

Four Reasons: The Garden and Its Double

Case Study

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Abstract—Analysis of an experimental educational methodology aimed at professional development in the field of visual arts. For this, it is based on the experimental and expository proposal consisting of the use of site-specific sculpture as a creative and methodological strategy for the exploration of the line of own research of students of plastic arts degree and pre-doctoral postgraduates. The selection of the students/artists was made based on the creative research lines they develop, examples of works that start from considering the sculptural as intrinsically related to the environment, and more specifically with the natural environment from a phenomenological and structural point of view in terms of artistic experience; and also, from a point of view of sculptural linguistic research based on the Kraussian foundations of the expanded sculptural field that formally arise from a Piaget's group.

On the other hand, the exhibition proposal is intended as a framework for deepening production and artistic diffusion oriented to immersion in a professional experience in which all aspects of the creative process can be addressed, from the mere idea to dissemination through from different means of artistic work, so that the training obtained by the artists/students is holistic in terms of the professional field of visual arts.

Keywords—Site-specific; sculpture; expanded field; environment; professional experience

1 Introduction

This contribution is made from the point of view of the analysis of a special case, the artistic exhibit presented on October 4, 2018 in a very special place given its unique characteristics, the Memorial Garden of the San Gabriel Cemetery Park¹ in the city of Malaga, Spain.

¹ This exhibit was one of the fruits of the agreement signed between the public company *Parcemasa*, manager of the cemetery and the University of Malaga in 2014.

The exhibition consisted of the participation of four authors, who have different relationships with the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Malaga as they are studying or have completed and have acquired different levels of academic training. Thus, at the time of the exhibition, Tessa Gill is a final year student and is preparing her Final Degree Paper. Samara Martínez is a recent graduate in Fine Arts with a magnificent record like Belén Liebana, and finally, Ana Isabel Angulo obtained her Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Artistic Production from the University of Málaga in the academic year 2015-2016.

The exhibit was configured from the experimental idea by which the selection of works and artists can be made using the concept of expanded field in the sculpture of Rosalind Krauss. art critic, researcher and professor at Columbia University. In other words, the scheme or group of Piaget that she elaborated to synthesize this idea can be an effective selector device with which to elaborate the argument that is articulated through the exhibited works.

2 Methods

The exhibit responds to artistic criteria in the first place, above all the quality of the works, the narrative discourse that emanates and the trajectory or coherence of the artistic production of the authors. But due to the nature of the environment in which the works are located, that is, the Memorial Garden of the San Gabriel Cemetery Park, the works must also respond to two other criteria: Firstly, a correct integration with the environment and secondly, an adequate relationship with the other sculptures.

In order to guarantee the response to these considerations, an open call was implemented for all students, both active and graduates, of the current degrees in the Faculty of Fine Arts. This call established that applicants had to present their work as sculptural intervention projects in a natural environment.

The selection of the proposals was made on the basis of their adaptation to the parameters described above and which, more specifically in terms of art, are a clear narrative and formal commitment to intervention and integration with the natural environment with the marked accent of belonging this reality to the vital human dimension such as the cemetery of the city.

2.1 The site-specific art

As a result of the necessary adaptation of the pieces to this peculiar environment, one of the methodological strategies established for the call for the exhibition is the idea of a work specially made and thought for a specific place, the site-specific artistic method, articulated in the 70s by Robert Irwin².

² Butterfield, J., MacHugh, J., Irwin, R., Turrell, J., Nordman, M., Wheeler, D., ... & Vogel, S. K. (1993). *The art of light+ space*. New York: Abbeville press.

As is already known, by means of this method, the works participate directly with the enclave where they are going to be placed to such an extent that even the narrative structure is determined by the place, and thanks to this, the sculpture returns to its paradigm or essence characteristic prior to the avant-garde, the statuary, although without losing the formal advances in terms of representation or formal language.

That is to say, the projects had to be conceived starting from the notion of a specific natural environment with a high semantic load, since it belongs to another major area that is the San Gabriel Cemetery Park. In this way, the students who wanted to participate had to have this fundamental starting parameter, the works and projects in one way or another would establish a dialogue with this special place, the works or stories that make them up would speak in some way of time, of life or its end, of human nature.

2.2 The expanded field of Rosalind Krauss³ as structure and organizing plot of the exhibition

The adventure of sculpture throughout the centuries has been paradigmatic to understand the different processes and advances of the artistic fact in regard to its first essence. The sculptural discipline has undergone dramatic changes since its academic conception, that is, when the plastic language was limited to the mere representation of forms, human bodies and things, in such a way that the sculpture was the thin layer, the skin, that covers the solid material of the marble⁴.

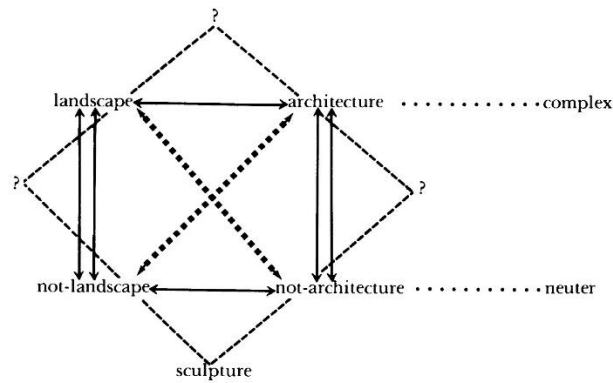


Fig. 1. Krauss scheme in a previous state of its result.

³ Krauss, R. (1979). Sculpture in the expanded field. *October*, 8, p. 33.

⁴ Wittkower, R., & Wittkower, M. (1977). *Sculpture: processes and principles*. New York: Harper & Row.

From the artistic experiences from which Rosalind Krauss builds her fundamental argument, which explain the role of postmodern sculpture in terms of the expanded field in which the fields of expression or scenarios where it is possible to develop them are related, the approach of art to the natural environment or the open environment, and above all, that which is contrary to the architectural interior space of the traditional “white box” museum, has become fundamental spaces where the sculptural can take place in a decisive way. Both for the artistic fact and for the advancement of the sculptural language itself.

For Krauss the situation of the sculptural during the 60s and 70s is extremely critical, because of its objectification, its nomadic character, loss of museum sense and once its form is blurred and dematerialized, the sculpture can be everything and nothing at the same time: [...] The very term we had believed to be rescuing sculpture had begun to be confusing. [...] We had fallen into our own trap, and we thought we were doing sculpture without knowing what the sculpture was⁵.

As was logical, the sculpture assumed its negative character until the maximum exploitation, which, as Krauss indicates, was the result of the combination of non-architecture and non-landscape. Taking logical calculation to its limits, Krauss deduces by means of a graphic “Piaget’s group”⁶ the new possibilities offered to sculptural experiences from the 1970s onwards, which, according to this new expanded field of sculpture, could be marked places, localized constructions and axiomatic structures. With these new options the new proposals that will be carried out in the field of earth works will be configured.

2.3 The classification of each piece according to the expanded field of Krauss

Starting from this phenomenological idea of Krauss’s sculpture, and using her Piaget’s group applied to this discipline, we could see that each of the four main options of the graphic, which Krauss deduces from the relations of the four concepts of the basic square (architecture, landscape, non-architecture and non-landscape) are related outwards two by two, in such a way that the sculpture can be understood as the confluence between the two negatives. The union between the landscape and its opposite generates the signposted sites; in the same way that architecture and its negative give rise to axiomatic structures; and finally, the relationship between architecture and landscape generates a category, the site constructions, which could be on the opposite side of what we understand as sculpture.

⁵ Krauss, R. (1979). *Op. Cit.* p. 37.

⁶ Krauss bases her Piaget group on the so-called Klein group or *Vierergruppe*, a structure devised by the mathematician Felix Klein, in which each element of the whole is its own reciprocal or negative, enabling its logical deductions from the relations of these with itself and with others. For further information: Arfken, G. (1985) *Mathematical Methods for Physicists*, 3rd ed. Orlando, FL: Academic Press, pp. 184-185 and 239-240. And: Robert, S., & Brisson, J. (2016). The Klein group, squares of opposition and the explanation of fallacies in reasoning. *Logica Universalis*, 10(2-3), 377-392.

Applying these results to the selection of the works presented, a selection is made in which each one of the chosen ones could occupy the four spatial options generated by Krauss's scheme, identifying their works with these spatial strategies.

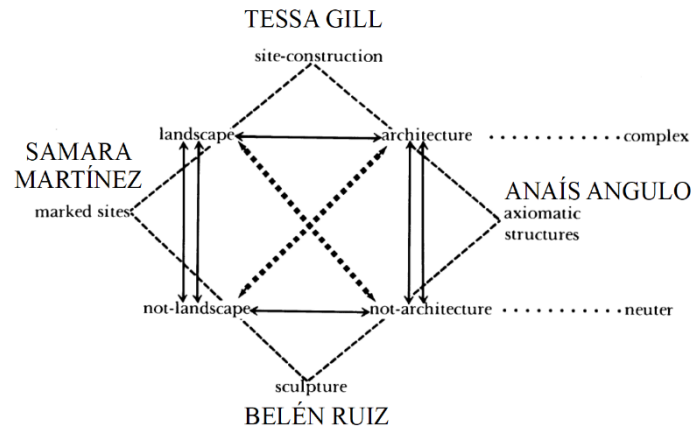


Fig. 2. The Krauss's schema with the results and the artist.

Thus, for the place occupied by the Sculpture, we select the proposal of Belén Ruiz Liébana; for the idea of construction-site we choose the site-specific installation of Tessa Gill; as an example of signposted location Sara Jiménez's installation is shown as the ideal one; and finally, as an example of axiomatic structure Anaís Angulo's work is the most suitable.

2.4 Anaís angulo

Anais Angulo's piece 8 Desconocidxs (8 Unknown) tells us how it is possible to investigate the sculptural language through the paradox of everyday reality and its representation through its most immediate objectivity. This piece becomes a conceptual spring that, through the physical inversion of the place, extracts the space from its base revealing its content while converting its own elements into layers of the subsoil in the way the mirror shows us our virtual and symmetrical image.

By decontextualizing its *povera*⁷ materials as well as the use of everyday objects, extracting them from their usual environment and introducing them into a totally alien environment, it forces us to place ourselves in different simultaneous reading planes, the mattress as a metaphor for the person, its metallic interior that reminds us of the industrial nature of the object and the artificial construction of our habitat.

⁷ The term *povera* corresponds to the meaning of the word associated with the European informalist movement, between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, of *arte povera*, in which artists such as Jannis Kounellis, Luciano Fabro, Richard Serra, Joseph Beuys or Mario Merz, elaborated their works often using humble or organic materials. Celant, G. (1985) *Arte Povera: Histories and Protagonists*, Milan: Electa, 1985.

All these levels intersect, crystallizing in the total relationship with the environment, forming an absolute block that integrates perfectly into this environment, on the other hand so foreign and close at the same time.

Her processual methodology throughout her intense work includes systems of analysis and substantiation of subliminal spatial structures that we find in our urban environment and that substance through the transformation of found objects. Underlying her work is an experiential narrative that takes us back to situationism⁸ and to povera authors such as Kounellis, in which a great personal and biographical plot is evident that transpires throughout her work and that solidifies through these materials and objects, both industrial and referential to memory.



Fig. 3. 8 *Desconocidos*. Anaís Angulo.2018.

And it is here in this slippery terrain where the author situates her discourse, and does so by invoking the memory of so many forgotten bodies in the bloody crimes committed in the Spanish Civil War. However, it is impossible to avoid the universalizing character of any important plastic work, since the call is necessarily extrapolated to any known war.

As we can see, its narrative and formal corpus adapts perfectly to the consideration of axiomatic structure, above all from the most material and object point of view, the skeletons of the mattresses in the natural environment are placed on a plane that is at the same time stripped of the environment and perfectly adapted to it, in a critical ambivalence that confers it its decontextualization.

⁸ Situationism is the movement of analysis and critique of modern society that facilitated narrative exploration strategies that abound in the mid-20th century postmodern narrative, such as Guy Debord's concept of *détournement*. Debord, G. (1958). *Theory of Drift*. Situationist International, 1.

2.5 Belén ruiz

The work of Belén Ruiz is very different, consisting of various sculptures, *Metamorphosis* and *Transmutation I and II*, which belong to her line of plastic research framed in the concept of metamorphosis and evolution. Her works refer all to the form of an organic capsule or oval organic cover that in some cases is open and in others is not. Their technical implementation varies in the material in each case, varying from metal to methacrylate and white PVC that remind us of authors such as Moholy-Nagy⁹,¹⁰, but always building from the tape as the silk thread of the caterpillar that wraps itself up.

Like Anaís Angulo, this author uses materials that are artificial and foreign to the natural environment, although her formal allegory structured from the perfect chrysalis speaks to us of the indelible natural heritage to which we all belong. That is to say, her formalist narrative is eminently representative and metaphorical, A instead of B. Her essential concern is the construction of sculptures that amplify this germinal and transforming idea of life, even with her own personal identification with that message.



Fig. 4. *Metamorphosis and Transformations I, II, III and IV.* Belén Ruiz. 2018.

This proposal adheres to the purest sculptural paradigm by which the work is articulated as a purely three-dimensional entity of round bulge, that is, its limits are clearly defined both formally and from a narrative or symbolic point of view. It stands as what it is, it is transparent in its commitment and does not intend to go beyond the mere aesthetic presence as a sculpture itself.

⁹ Blencowe, C and J. (2018). *Moholy's Edit*. Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers.

¹⁰ Botar, O. A. I. (2014). *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts* (Vol. 2). Lars Müller Publishers.

Both for the quality of its invoice and for the roundness of its shape, this work is perfectly suited to the place that Krauss determines for the sculpture in her scheme.

2.6 Samara Martínez

This artist makes a magnificent ephemeral installation entitled *Ver de vida* (Green life) in which she establishes a dialogue between the everyday objects she uses and the natural environment that she uses as a support. As Otto Piene¹¹ explored in his extensive work from inflatable forms, Samara constructs her work with green balloons and her discourse lies in a veiled critique of the role of man in the natural environment. The destruction of the ecosystem is a basic concern in her work and, through plastic language, she defends nature through the contemplative reflection to which she invites us.

This work offers multiple methodological directions in the plastic, above all we find in this piece high performative capacities. The vital breath of the artist is the one that gives life to the work, as Manzoni¹² presents us in his series of balloons inflated by the artist's Breath of 1960. However, Samara makes her installation from innumerable human breaths with which he reconstructs the nature of the tree. This richness of multiple relationships between man and nature presented to us is based only on the humble but vital act of breathing, her own breath as an artist.



Fig. 5. *Ver de vida*. Samara Martínez. 2018

It is a firm defender of the natural environment, despite the industrial object, Samara's work does not end in her exhibition, as an ephemeral piece that is, the remains are collected minutely in order to use them in new proposals in an unfinished process of plastic generation that recalls the vital processes of nature.

¹¹ Piene, O., & Russett, R. (2008). Sky, scale and technology in art. *Leonardo*, 41(5), 511-518.

¹² Celant, G. (Ed.). (1992). *Piero Manzoni*. Milan: Electa.

But it is the skill in choosing the place and the indicative character of the objects that make up the installation that makes the work adapt to the figure of “marked places” deduced by Krauss. The object chosen by the author, the humble globe, is related to the place not only through form but also through color, adapting and camouflaging itself but pointing to the landscape that contains it.

2.7 Tessa Gill

Finally, Tessa Gill’s work *Origin* tackles the problems of the environment from an inclusive perspective, as her work aims to take advantage of organic form to extract her own world, which she constructs by means of structured domes with parabolic linear lines. From this formal point of view, a certain parallelism could be established with Belén Ruiz’s work, but its intention is none other than the anthropological exploration of man’s need for the construction of niches-dome to serve as a shelter. Using such natural materials as esparto grass and plaster, her work is formally and conceptually integrated into the medium in which it is shown.



Fig. 6. *Origin*. Tessa Gill. 2018.

It is impossible for us to avoid the povera references of her work, both in the anthropological aspect that reminds us of Mario Merz¹³ and his igloos, and the gestural and processual one that reminds us of the interventions of authors like Eva Hesse in works such as *52 no title* (1969-70), since Gill’s constructions start from the same physical-conceptual presuppositions:

¹³ Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía [MNCARS], (2019). *Mario Merz. El Tiempo es mudo*. Madrid, Spain.

Thanks to the force of gravity of the earth, Gill makes, with primary materials and from nature, her structures which he later invests in the search for the primary habitat. This procedure was also used by Gaudí¹⁴ to calculate the tensile forces in his project for the Cathedral of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

Undoubtedly this architectural reference is one that endows him to be the candidate work to represent the last of Krauss's scheme options, the category of "place construction", because not only are they literal constructive elements, but the installation constructs the place giving it a unique sense, to be the container of the work, the place that receives meaning according to its capacity to receive the construction elaborated by Tessa Gill.

3 Conclusion

As we have demonstrated, the structuring idea of the exhibition, the Piaget group developed by Krauss and its application to the selection of the works that compose it, in addition to the site-specific concepts and the environment as an active element in the reading of the exhibition, become an ideal device for the configuration of the exhibition, hence its name Four reasons: the garden and its double.

In short, there are four interventions of different characteristics but which are intrinsically related to the natural environment by means of various mechanisms to which we have tried to shed a little light. Thanks to these four authors we make the necessary relationship between contemporary art and the environment more evident and we bring the artistic experience closer in one of its noblest expressions, making the human also mean establishing a more enriching aesthetic relationship with the natural environment.

On the other hand, this exhibition strategy has enabled the authors to develop their artistic work in a professional dimension that enables them to tackle future projects. The need to project their work, to devise it according to established and specific parameters of a given place, provide them with experience and useful skills for their work as artists.

4 References

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¹⁴ Huerta-Fernández, S. (2013). El cálculo de estructuras en la obra de Gaudí. En: *Salvador Tarragó: miscel·lània*. Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Barcelona, pag. 136.

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