DIRECTIONS

SUSANA SOLANO

NOVEMBER 16, 1989 - FEBRUARY 11, 1990

Turning around, imagining moving forward through space that is open and limitless, putting new cages again around spaces that are empty, delimited, filled, in order to preserve some trace of that particular feeling. Encaging them like prisoners of space itself, like cages without space between iron bars, like inaccessible rooms, like the rain that fills the holes and levels the horizon.

Turning around, imagining moving forward through space that is closed, delimited, breaking out, modeling, constructing, blanking out the underground of black space so as not to visualize it. Like a mirror that repeats experience.

1987

Turning around, she showed her doubt, and they did not understand it.

Turning around, she showed her appearance and came to believe in it.

Later, turning around, she became dizzy, and without more ado, turned in the other direction: “She has understood that there was nothing to understand.”

“That which comes to appearance has to manifest itself in order to appear.” (Goethe)

Susana Solano

Fig. 2. Barry X Ball, 1988. Iron; 91/4 x 120 x 105 in. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago. Photo: Ferran Freixa.
Born in Barcelona in 1946, Susana Solano studied art there and worked until the late 1970s as a painter. Her first solo exhibition of sculpture occurred in 1980 at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona. These early sculptures were hanging canvas forms, which can be thought of as transitions from flat canvas to three-dimensional shapes. Through the mid 1980s Solano experimented with a succession of materials: wood, plaster, and, later, iron and lead. She has often worked in series, with titles alluding to a dialogue between interior and exterior forms. By 1986 she had arrived at her characteristic open yet enclosing crib, cage, and swimming pool forms, which she continues to juxtapose with tables and other solid shapes.

Solano belongs to the first generation of artists to emerge from post-Franco Spain to increasing international attention. Significantly, she often titles her works in Catalan, the use of which was banned under Franco. While it is tempting to place her work within a specifically Spanish or Catalan context, it is also evident that, like many of her contemporaries, she has looked "everywhere and nowhere in particular." Critics have noted relationships in her work—to Brancusi in her reduction of sculpture to essential form and direct working of material; to Giacometti in her visualization of personal experience; to Julio Gonzalez in her allusion to the traditional Catalan craft of iron working; and finally to Minimalism in her simple, large-scale, industrial-looking forms. Her works express a synthesis of traditional modernism and the art of the seventies combined with a desire to give form to a personal and poetic experience of space. The unsettling dialectic in her work is between what is known and unknown, between the clarity of the forms and their implied content. The physical presence of her sculptures also suggests its opposite: memory and absence.

Although Solano's work bears obvious associations with Minimal sculpture, two major differences are evident: Her sculpture has always been made by hand, and it abounds with specific references. Solano's recent work concerns spaces and limits—limits of access, limits of knowledge—in which interior forms are often enclosed or hidden, suggesting simultaneously imprisonment or protection. Espai Ambulant, 1986 (cover), the earliest piece in the exhibition, is in many ways the simplest, most delicate and overtly romantic. The title (in Catalan, "movable space") reveals her attitude toward the mutability of spaces and how they are personally experienced. The immediate inspiration for the piece was circus cages. The visual reference to enclosed spaces that are real yet temporary and moveable raises questions about the nature of space: where it is, what defines it, and how we experience it. References are also ambiguous in Solano’s work, and her forms spark associations with similar places and objects. Espai Ambulant has been compared to sanctuary screens or the leading of stained glass windows, an association with cathedrals that is further suggested by the fact that a related piece takes the form of a table top or altar.

If Espai Ambulant alludes elliptically to church-like spaces, an architectural reference is overt in the post-and-lintel construction of La Caritat #5, 1988 (fig. 1). Evoking at once an archway or window—and thus either an entrance or a barrier—the metal-encased wood form also brings to mind medieval armor, which conceals and protects. The title (in Catalan, "charity") alludes to the Casa de Caritat, a former hospice or poor house in Barcelona. The sculpture is part of a series of works that was realized in the building, which will become the home of the city's contemporary art museum. Thus, while Espai Ambulant refers to spaces that...
move from place to place, _La Caritat #5_ refers to a specific site that will eventually be transformed.

The cage- or crib-like forms of _Bany Rus_, 1988 (fig. 2), and _No Te Pases #1_, 1988 (fig. 3), return to the theme of enclosure. The title, _Bany Rus_ (in Catalan, "Russian bath"), provides a straightforward reference to public baths and their mysterious interior spaces. Swimming pools appear frequently in Solano's recent work, and water is suggested by the reflective glass of _No Te Pases #1_ (in Spanish, "Do not pass through, do not go too far"). This warning is reinforced by the iron bars that cradle and protect the sculpture’s fragile glass and keep us away from its potentially dangerous surface.

_Bon Appétit, Messieurs_, 1989 (fig. 4), takes the form of a table draped in heavy plastic "cloth," with a mysterious object laid on top. While literal in its presentation, like the companion piece to _Espai Ambulant_ mentioned earlier, this table also suggests an altar, a scene of sacrifice.

![](image)

Fig. 4. _Bon Appétit, Messieurs_, 1989. Iron and plastic sheeting: 34 x 52½ x 52½ in. The Oliver-Hoffmann Collection, Chicago. Photo: Susana Solano.

Solano’s sculptures attest to a continuing belief in art’s evocative power. The contemporary appeal of her work resides in its austere formal beauty and conflation of cultural references and memory. She relates a story that is a literary parallel to the content of her sculptures: the experience of mysterious spaces (the woods and caves) and objects (the partially hidden cakes).

The three of us went out to paint with the paint boxes and easels they had just given us. We were filled with excitement although the place we were going was not unknown to us, but now we were drawn by a totally new interest. The wood through which we were walking was sparse and crossed by a great number of small paths. The pines grew tall and slender, and the ground was covered in pine needles that slipped and rustled with every step...

The women were busy in the kitchen, preparing the Easter monas. They were kneading vigorously, melting the butter and greasing the molds; then they filled them with dough and put them in to bake; finally they decorated the cakes with chocolate and colored palm trees.

The wood was rectangular and ran along the side of a ravine; as we went down, through thickets and bramble-patches, there was mysterious quietness... When we reached the mouth of the cave, on clayey ground, we began to paint.

By mid-afternoon, the monas were ready; then, we put them on top of the sideboard, and there they stayed until the feast-day... An enormous sideboard, on which we could see only the tops of the dishes, which stuck up.

For many years, Anna, Joseph M, and I continued to play in those places.

**Phyllis Rosenzweig**

**Associate Curator**

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3. Milena Kalinovska, from a conversation with the artist.

4. "Space doesn't exist for me, the artist has said, "it is something so ambiguous that I feel the need to delimit it... Space [is also] where we are, or what is around me... when I am with my daughter in her room and I can hear her breathe. These are spaces that are delimited, defined and, above all, experienced. The void is like closing your eyes, like darkness." In Gambrell, Jamey. "Susana Solano," in _Carnegie International_. 136. Exhibition catalog. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 1988.


6. The artist explained this and other titles in a letter dated August 22, 1989.

Fig. 3. No To Pates #1, 1988. Iron and glass; 26½ x 66½ x 39 in. Jay Chiat, New York. Photo: Pierran Freska, courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.
BIOGRAPHY
Born in Barcelona, July 25, 1946.
Educated at Bellas Artes de San Jorge, Barcelona.
Lives and works in Barcelona.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
1989 Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, West Germany; Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHECKLIST
Espai Ambulant, 1986
Iron, steel, lead; 100 x 99 x 99 in.
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
Bany Rus, 1988
Iron; 91 x 120 1/2 x 105 1/2 in.
Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago
La Caritat #5, 1988
Iron and wood; 72 x 70 x 18 1/2 in.
Jay Chiat, New York
No Te Pases #1, 1989
Iron and glass; 26 1/4 x 66 1/4 x 39 in.
Jay Chiat, New York
Bon Appétit, Messieurs, 1989
Iron and plastic sheeting; 34 x 52 x 52 in.
The Oliver-Hoffmann Collection