

DIRECTIONS

SUSANA SOLANO

NOVEMBER 16, 1989 - FEBRUARY 11, 1990



Espai, 1986. Iron, steel, lead; 100 x 99 x 99 in. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

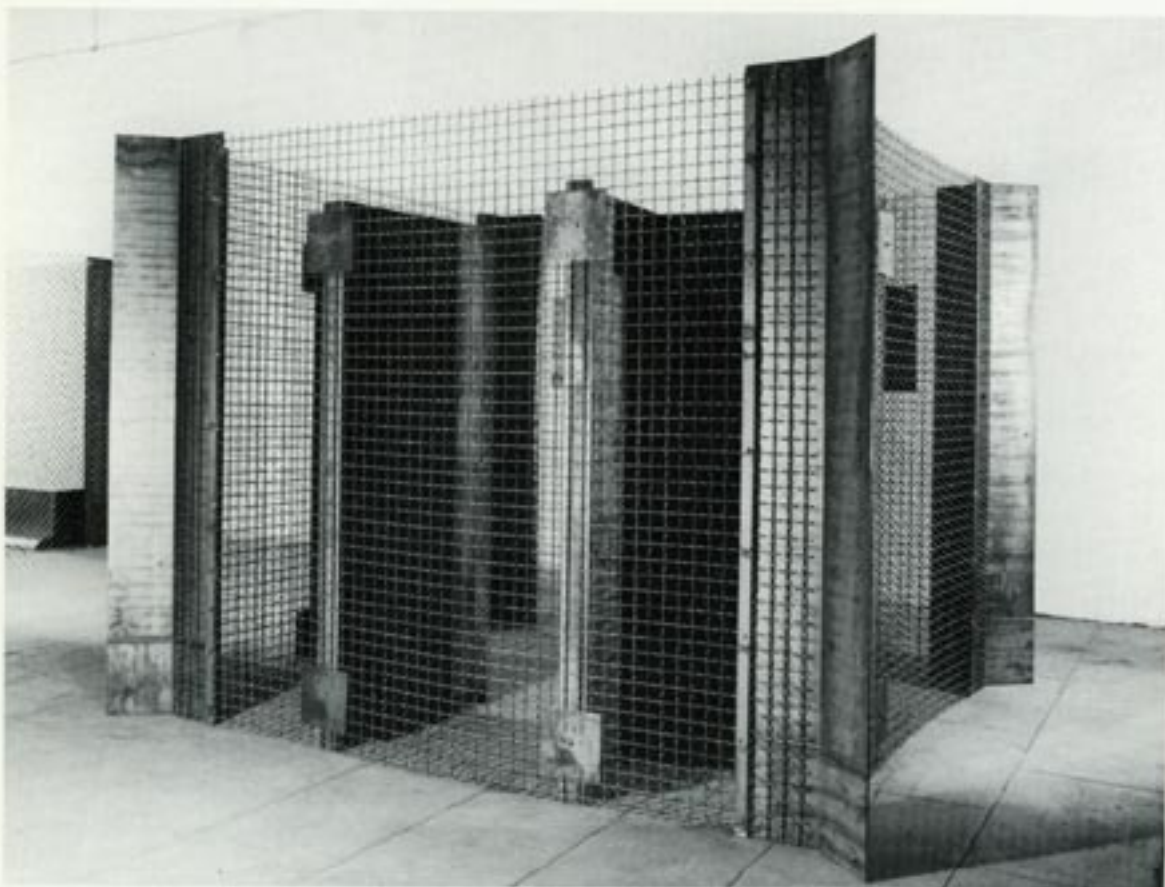


Fig. 2. Bany Rau, 1988. Iron; 91 1/4 x 120 1/2 x 105 1/2 in. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago. Photo: Ferran Freixa.

1983

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 Solano¹

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."² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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,⁵ 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.⁶ Thus, while *Espai Ambulant* refers to spaces that

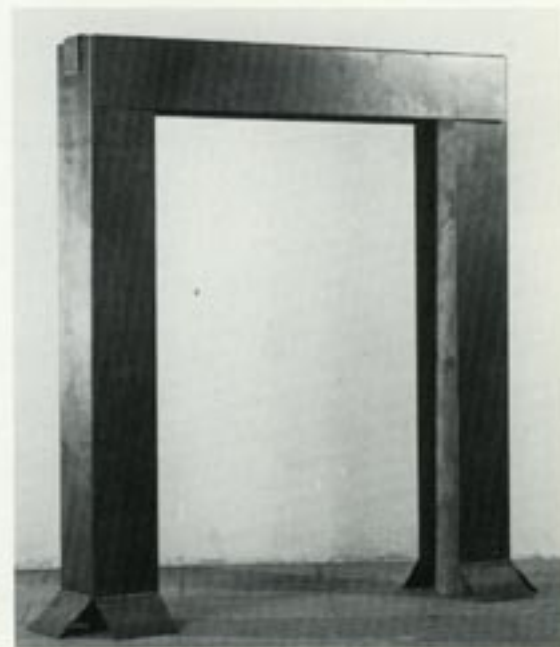


Fig. 1. *La Caritat #5*, 1988. Iron and wood; 72 x 70 x 18½ in. Jay Chao, New York. Photo: Ferran Frisxa, courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

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.



Fig. 4. *Bon Appétit, Messieurs*, 1989. Iron and plastic sheeting; 34 x 52½ x 52¾ 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.⁷

Phyllis Rosenzweig
Associate Curator

1. Susana Solano, "Un Textu de Susana Solano," *Spazio Umano/Human Space* 2 (April 1987): 43. Translated from the Spanish by Inoëga Foster.

2. Aurora García, "Ambit of Intensity: The Sculpture of Susana Solano," in *Susana Solano, 7*. Exhibition catalog. Nîmes: Galerie des Aînés Chapelle des Jénats, 1987.

3. Milena Kalinowska, 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, Janey, "Susana Solano," in *Carnegie International*, 136. Exhibition catalog. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 1988.

5. Robert Mahoney, "Dialogue with Space," *Arts Magazine* 61 (December 1988): 108.

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

7. Susana Solano in *En Tres Dimensiones*, 91. Exhibition catalog. Madrid: Fundación Caja de Pensiones, 1984. Translated from the Spanish by Inoëga Foster.



Fig. 3. *No Te Pares #1*, 1988. Iron and glass; 26½ x 66½ x 39 in. Jay Chiat, New York. Photo: Ferran Freixa, 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

- 1980 Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona. *Esculturas i Dibujos-Susana Solano*.
- 1986 Galeria Fernando Vijañe, Madrid, *Susana Solano: Esculturas 1984/86*.
- 1987 Galeria Maeght, Barcelona, *Susana Solano Esculturas*; Galerie des Arènes, Chapelle des Jésuits, Nîmes, France; Galleria Giorgio Persano, Turin; Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, France, *Susana Solano: Sculptures de 1981 à 1987*.
- 1988 Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London.
- 1989 Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, West Germany; Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1978 Sala Gaspar, Galeria Joan Prats, Galeria Cento, and Galerie Eude, Barcelona. *Festa de la Lletra*.
- 1983 Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid. *Preliminar: 1.ª Bienal Nacional de las Artes Plásticas*.
- 1984 Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid. *En Tres Dimensiones*.
- 1985 Utsukushi-ga-hara Open-Air Museum, Chisegata-gun, Japan. *The Fourth Henry Moore Grand Prix Exhibition*.
- 1986 Serpentine Gallery, London. *Three Spanish Artists*; Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid. *Pintores y Escultores Españoles 1981-1986*, and tour to Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Jouy-en-Josas, France.
- 1987 Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, West Germany. *Documenta 8*; Westfälischen Landesmuseums für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany. *Skulptur Projekte in Münster 1987*; Parque Ibirapuera, São Paulo, Spanish Pavilion, XIX São Paulo Bienal; Galerie Adrien Maeght-Montrouge, Montrouge, France. *Susana Solano/Aki Kuroda*.
- 1988 Spanish Pavilion, 43rd Venice Biennale; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. *Dialogue with Space*; Chicago Public Library Cultural Center. *Epoca Nueva: Painting and Sculpture from Spain*; and tour to Akron (Ohio) Art Museum, Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral

Gables; Farideh Cadot Gallery, New York, Joel Fisher, Markus Raetz, and Susana Solano; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. *Carnegie International*; Marta Cervera Gallery, New York, *Sol LeWitt and Susana Solano*.

- 1989 Donald Young Gallery, Chicago. Tony Cragg. *Richard Deacon, Martin Puryear, Susana Solano*.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blanch, Teresa. *Susana Solano: Esculturas 1984/86*. Exhibition catalog. Madrid: Fernando Vijañe Editor, 1986.

Brenson, Michael. "Joel Fisher, Markus Raetz, and Susana Solano." *New York Times*, November 4, 1988, Sec. C, p. 33.

Gambrell, Jamey. "Five From Spain." *Art in America* 75 (September 1987): 160-71.

_____. "Susana Solano." In *Carnegie International*, 136-37. Exhibition catalog. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 1988.

García, Aurora. "Madrid: Susana Solano." *Artforum* 25 (September 1986): 142-43.

Koether, Jutta, and Diedrich Diederichsen. "Jutta and Diedrich Go to Spain." *Artscribe* 59 (September-October 1986): 56-61.

Mahoney, Robert. "Dialogue with Space." *Arts Magazine* 63 (December 1988): 108.

Maure, Gloria. "An Encounter with a Secret: The Sculpture of Susana Solano." *Artforum* 26 (September 1987): 100-103.

Power, Kevin. "Susana Solano: Montenegro." *Flash Art* 135 (Summer 1987): 115.

Rose, Barbara. "Susana Solano: Modernist Sculpture in a New Idiom." In *Three Spanish Artists*. Exhibition catalog. London: Serpentine Gallery, 1986.

_____. "Susana Solano: The Poetry of Silence." *The Journal of Art* 1 (December 1988): 67.

Solano, Susana. Statement in *En Tres Dimensiones*, 93. Exhibition catalog. Madrid: Fundación Caja de Pensiones, 1984. Essay by Gloria Maure.

_____. "Un Texto de Susana Solano." *Spazio Umano/Human Space* 2 (April 1987): 42-45.

Susana Solano. Exhibition brochure. Turin: Galleria Persano, 1987. Essay by Rosa Queralt.

Susana Solano. Exhibition catalog. Nîmes, France: Galerie des Arènes, Chapelle des Jésuits, 1987. Essay by Aurora García.

Susana Solano. Exhibition catalog. London: Anthony Reynolds Gallery, 1988. Essay by Teresa Blanch.

Susana Solano. Exhibition catalog. Mönchengladbach, West Germany: Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, 1989. Essay by Teresa Blanch.

Susana Solano *Esculturas*. Exhibition catalog. Barcelona: Galeria Maeght, 1987. Essay by Francisco Calvo Serraller.

Susana Solano. *Sculptures de 1981 à 1987*. Exhibition catalog. Bordeaux, France: Musée d'Art Contemporain, 1987. Essay by Jean-Marc Poinot.

CHECKLIST

Espai Ambulant, 1986
Iron, steel, lead; 100 x 99 x 99 in.
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Bany Rus, 1988
Iron; 91 1/4 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, 1988
Iron and glass; 26 1/4 x 66 1/2 x 39 in.
Jay Chiat, New York

Bon Appétit, Messieurs, 1989
Iron and plastic sheeting; 34 x 52 1/4 x 52 1/4 in.
The Oliver-Hoffmann Collection, Chicago



HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND
SCULPTURE GARDEN
Smithsonian Institution