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Dirección General de Proyectos Culturales

THE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM IN MADRID

Over the last two years, the City Hall of Madrid has been organising a program to open up the urban space of the city to experimentation and contemporary creativity and to promote the interaction between citizens and the city. These artistic proposals interact with social and political processes and are aimed at all individuals who, directly or indirectly, live together within a specific physical, communicative, social and symbolic space: the city of Madrid. The program involves three types of activities or processes:

- “MADRID ABIERTO”
- “ESPACIOS DE LUZ” [illuminated areas]
- “ITINERARIOS DEL SONIDO” [itineraries of sound], in addition to other occasional public art interventions.

The public art program that has been set up by the City Hall of Madrid plays an important role in covering the need for these types of activities and experimental expression within the public sphere. The program aims to satisfy citizens as a whole, and is not focused exclusively on contemporary art specialists. This involves introducing current artistic expression into the city, situating contemporary works and the citizens contemplating the works within a contemporary environment. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to stimulate contemporary art that involves the citizens, resolves spatial conflict, addresses concerns, disputes and social issues, and gives expression to the cultural heritage and desires of the inhabitants of the city.

Public art offers artists the chance to place their work before the community in a real-life setting. This allows the artist, organisers and the public to learn and gain experience.



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Public art, if it is to be truly “public”, is a task that implicates everyone. Therefore, it is essential to increase citizens’ participation in issues relating to the city. The public art program strengthens the bonds between the technicians, artists, professionals and politicians who participate in these activities and establish free-flowing communications with the social agents who act as mediators.

Therefore, artistic intervention in the public sphere requires the participation of all sectors within the society via its democratic bodies and representatives. The Government Department for Arts of the City Hall of Madrid collaborates with Plastic and Visual Artists Associations, designers and architects and cultural institutions and foundations, in order to establish the entrance requirements for artists who wish to participate in the public art programs and set up the panel of judges during selection processes.

The public art program is financed by two public administrations – the City Hall of Madrid and the Autonomous Government of the Region of Madrid – along with several private and public cultural bodies.

1.- The “MADRID ABIERTO” project was set up last year with financing from the City Hall of Madrid, the Autonomous Government of the Region of Madrid and the Altadis Foundation. The project also involves the collaboration of several cultural institutions: The Fine Arts Association, the “Casa de América”, ARCO and Televisión Española [Spanish Television]. All of these private and public institutions respect the independent nature of the program.

The artistic interventions are set to take place in February, coinciding with the ARCO International Contemporary Art Fair. “MADRID ABIERTO”, the origins of which are linked to the “Open Spaces” program organised in ARCO in 2001 and



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2002, involves initiatives that are not catered for in the fair or within the world of commercial art that is presented in the galleries.

The objective of this program of public art in the city, which this year celebrates its second edition, is to stimulate creativity within a specific area, taking into consideration the specific characteristics of each place and the appropriate moment. In order to achieve this goal, MADRID ABIERTO uses several public spaces within the city of Madrid as settings (in the area taking in the main streets). The projects put forward new formats using the existing channels and infrastructures within the city, its communication networks, transport networks and media, and involves buildings, thoroughways and elements of street furniture, with the aim of interacting with the citizens of the city.

The MADRID ABIERTO model is based on the system used in the international projects selection process wherein the majority of the budget goes towards artistic production and fees and the collective work required to develop the program.

The projects are chosen in an annual international selection process that is open to individual artists or groups of any nationality. The selection process establishes the number of projects that will be chosen (between 4 and 6), the urban area where the artistic interventions will take place and the documentation that must be provided by participants (curriculum, project description, sketches and estimated budget). The institutions behind MADRID ABIERTO appoint the members of the panel of judges, and the successful candidates are chosen from amongst renowned professional artists within the contemporary art circle.

The first edition of MADRID ABIERTO made a notable impact at national and international levels. The selection process involved 234 projects by 316



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internationally recognised artists. In the second edition, 439 projects were submitted by artists from 49 different countries.

The projects that have been chosen deal with problems that are typically encountered in the city: housing, the use of city streets for advertising, violence presented in the form of entertainment, noise pollution, cultural memories and heritage and architectural transformation. The projects will be set up along side other projects that are linked to the program and which have been directly commissioned from the artists. This year, the Ministry of Culture from Mexico, the special guest country in ARCO 05, has collaborated in several projects. The program attempts to promote the exchange of experiences between new artists and artists who have already made a name for themselves within the sphere of public art.

The 2004 projects include interventions that make reference to the common methods of communication within the city, such as Maider López's project that deals with advertising in the city, or the more openly political project by Fernando Sánchez Castillo, which made one of the city's most emblematic monuments (the figure of Felipe IV on horseback) accessible to citizens by placing moulds of the statue at the eye level of visitors.

Other projects that involve a more active participation were also selected, such as the project by the "El Perro" group which allowed visitors to cast votes in order to demolish some of Madrid's most emblematic buildings within a virtual environment, or the project by the Swiss corporation "etoy", which installed computer offices in a large square in order to analyse the industry of art. Architectural transformation was considered from various points of view by the Sans Façon group, which converted a water tank into a sculpture; Diana Larrea, who, taking inspiration from Hitchcock's famous film "The Birds", covered the facade of a historic building with plastic crows; and *House-Madrid* (Wolfgang Weideler), who presented the



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processes of construction and deconstruction simultaneously in the form of two identical facades that stood facing each other.

The problems of the modern city were addressed in the project by Elena Bajo and Warren Neidich entitled *Silent*, which involved setting up sculpted Plexiglas acoustic screens in one of Madrid's main byways, as a temporary gesture to decrease noise pollution within the city; and *Emancipator bubble* by Alex Mitxelena and Hugo Olaizola, which involved an inflatable bubble-shaped room that provided a large degree of independence without the need of leaving the family home.

The MADRID ABIERTO 2005 projects address the changes that have taken place within society: *Taxi Madrid* by Anne Lorenz and Rebekka Reich is a project wherein the public are taxied around Madrid on the basis of the memories of people who once lived in Madrid and who currently live in other countries. *Familias Encontradas* by Fernando Baena is a project wherein photographs that were found by chance in a box will be placed on the facade of the Fine Arts Society in an attempt to provide a common reference point for collective memories and trace the changes that our society has undergone. María Alós and Nicolas Dumit, present a project that was previously set up in Mexico and New York: *Museo Peatonal*, which involves an exhibition of objects donated by the citizens of Madrid as an expression of the spirit of the neighbourhood where the project is installed.

In front of the Prado Museum, Oscar Lloveras has set up rice-paper structures amongst the trees, in order to focus on aspects of nature within an urban space. The *Mirador Nómada* project by José Dávila involves setting up scaffolding on one of the city's buildings in order to provide a viewpoint for observing the city, inverting the "observer/observed object" relationship. This theme is also addressed in *Zona Vigilada* by Henry Eric Hernández wherein videos of Havana and Madrid are



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screened with the aim of contrasting two cultural spaces from the perspective of harassment as the controlling event.

The transformation of space is dealt with in *Espacio Móvil* by “Compañía de Caracas”, which involves placing images at bus stops and on the buses themselves in order to transport the spectator to the centre of the city of Caracas. The same theme is also addressed by the Tercerunguinto group, who have placed metal boxes to house electric cables next to the cables in order to draw attention to the possibilities of sculpting this urban feature. *El Río* by Raimond Chaves and *Soy Madrid* by Simon Grennan and Christopher Sperandio use advertising mediums in order to narrate peoples’ experiences and convert texts and images into poetic and political tools, thereby attacking the control that the media exercises over the public.

2.- ESPACIOS DE LUZ aims to update the temporary urban lighting that is used to decorate the city streets at Christmas, thereby converting Madrid into one of the number of cities that use artificial light for creative purposes. The activities of ESPACIOS DE LUZ are set up along side traditional lighting projects and typical Christmas decorations.

The program was set up in December 2003 with a project involving two historic fountains in Madrid which were illuminated by the Sicilian Gaspare di Caro, who used a technique that draws a lot of inspiration from the concept of painting and prompts the public to, literally, look at monuments in a new light.

The selection of the proposals to illuminate Madrid in December 2004 was carried out via an international selection process that included the collaboration of the Architectural Association of Madrid, the Association of Visual Artists of Madrid and the Association of Professional Designers. The selection process was open to professionals from a wide variety of creative disciplines. The projects had to meet a number of requisites in terms of budget, standardisation and ease of installation, and



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had to include the following elements: tree lighting, rows of lights hung between houses in narrow streets, rows of lights hung between vertical street furniture in wide streets, free-standing lighting. In addition, specific ideas for Madrid's historical centre, with possible variations of the traditional elements, were taken into consideration

In the December 2004 edition 25 proposals were submitted, and five projects were selected, including two projects by foreign artists. In addition to the projects that were chosen via the selection process, other projects were set in motion by the City Hall of Madrid which directly commissioned artists from various artistic disciplines and styles: a scenographer, a plastic artist, a graphic designer and an architect. The panel of judges was made up of representatives from the Architectural Association of Madrid, the Association of Visual Artists of Madrid, the Spanish Association of Professional Designers and the City Hall of Madrid.

The lighting program was financed by the Government Department for the Environment and the Government Department for the Arts of the City Hall of Madrid. Financing for the next edition in DECEMBER 2005 will involve the collaboration of private and public bodies in order diversify and widen the scope of the lighting program to take in other public spaces.

The projects that were set up in December 2004 used a variety of styles and formal elements: the designer Manuel Estrada used lighting to write the word "peace" in 32 different languages which formed a small firmament of good wishes above the streets. The project *Confeti* by Sergio Sebastián employed coloured recycled plastic circles to project coloured circles onto the streets 24 hours a day. The scenographer Andrea D'Odorico used illuminated mats to frame the historical centre of the city and guide citizens to the Plaza Mayor. *Neblina* by Ben Mathis and Isabel Barbas employed an abstract approach to transform the appearance of public roads. Eva Lootz's design used curved strips of floor lighting to evoke the immense



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power of words in the streets around the National Library: she played with rhythm and alliteration and presented words that had different associations for each citizen.

The lighting program did involve a certain degree of controversy, but it served to initiate a debate and discussion forum on public spaces. The program attempted to integrate classic and traditional elements with contemporary and innovative designs, and, through lighting, give expression to the different ideas and feelings that people have about Christmas. For example, the artist Eva Lootz expressed the idea of Christmas, not only as a Christian celebration, but also as a celebration of the solstice that is strongly connected to light.

3.- A public art project entitled **ITINERIOS DEL SONIDO** is set to take place over the last three months of 2005. The project is organised and financed by the City Hall of Madrid and the University Hall of Residence, and represents an attempt to break away from the channels that are traditionally used to approach art.

This proposal make use of 20 bus stops, which will incorporate the works of 20 international artists composed exclusively of sounds. People will be able to listen to the works by connecting their earphones to the devices set up in the bus stops.

In this case, the artists have been chosen by the organisers of the project, María Bella and Miguel Álvarez Fernández, who have selected artists with diverse creative backgrounds. The main criteria for selection, over and above the artistic career of each author, involved the artist's ability to elaborate a proposal that explores the context of the area surrounding each bus stop and immerses listeners while they are waiting for the bus.

The City Hall of Madrid also promotes other occasional public art activities that are linked to commemorative acts and cultural festivals. Amongst these activities



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we should highlight the use of buildings undergoing restoration as new outlets for art, such as the upcoming installation of a giant marquee that will house a work dedicated to Don Quixote, which this year celebrates the 4th centenary of its first publication, or the use of urban space as an area to showcase work from the PHOTOESPAÑA Photography Festival in Madrid.

Taken as a whole, Madrid's program of public art presents artistic activity as a practice that, in complex current context, must be able to generate proposals that are different from the proposals imposed by dominant social norms. It must provide the context with aesthetic, social, communicative and functional significance. The involvement of the city's inhabitants, creative capacity, interdisciplinary cooperation, co-financing and administrative and cultural coordination are the elements that characterise Madrid's public art program.

Madrid, February 2005