

## **Susana Solano – Fragments and links**

### **Galería Rafael Pérez Hernando**

#### *Material spirituality*

"Melancholy is nothing more than a memory that is ignored"  
Gustave Flaubert

Around five years ago, on the occasion of Susana Solano's first individual exhibition at the Rafael Pérez Hernando gallery, the artist kindly entrusted me with the writing of the prologue text to the exhibition, which we put together jointly through a long conversation about the works. Now she has once again put her trust in me and we have repeated the format we used then.

The seed of the exhibition *Fragmentos y vínculos* ("Fragments and links") was the gallery owner's proposal to hold an exhibition which would include the works *Reclós* ("Shut In") and *Recipiente nº 2* ("Container nº 2"), both from 1982, shown for the last time at the gallery's stand at ARCO 2022, and the piece that gives the exhibition its title, which was part of Susana Solano's intervention in the project *Piedra, tela y arena* ("Stone, Cloth and Sand") in the Monastery of Santa María de Bujedo, in which Simon Callery also participated and for which I wrote the pages that precede this text.

The 2016 exhibition was made up of recently completed works. On this occasion, the pieces cover a very wide time span ranging from very early works, completed not much than a year after her first individual exhibition, until this year of 2022.

"Art is timeless" –she maintains at the beginning of our talk– "The making of the work is a zig-zag journey, forward and backward."

Its development and final result are the outcome of a personal selection by the artist, who chose sculptures and photographic series from the 1990s which, together with the older works, form a dense discourse in which they all converge, prolonging and broadening the experience of Santa María de Bujedo through the reaffirmation of a humanist spirituality that resolves itself in works of significant materiality projecting their being space into the space of the room and the internal

sentimental space of the viewer. A crossroads of sensitive proposals that, in turn, sensitize those who contemplate them and those who communicate them, since Susana Solano considers herself both author and spectator of her work.

Made up of pieces that retain their validity and that are related to the photographic series in a reading of social and family relationships... from a retrospective viewpoint which has a certain melancholy.

The two sculptures from 1982 –which Solano considers “as more archaeological”– refer, on the one hand, to a direct, manual way of doing things, dealing directly with the material, in this case plaster, and its subsequent casting in bronze, that takes us to certain childhood memories that we have recalled on other occasions and to the actions of kneading, squeezing and other activities close to domesticity. On the other, in the words of Marta Llorente: “From this time on, there is the start of a series of extremely massive works, concerned with the sensations of weight, of touch. Some of them were signed with the explicit title of *Capitell* (“Capital”, the architectural term). Others recreate images of other nearby bodies made in bronze. Bodies of strange things, also empty, in the form of receptacles and compact enclosures, called *Intus*, *Palau*, *Recipient*, *Reclós* (“Intus”, “Palace”, “Container”, “Shut In”). The enclosure is another of the narrative lines of an invented space that will resurface over time in Solano's work”.<sup>1</sup>

“They have qualities of storage objects, hints of times that are very vital and at the same time silent, yet also very vividly experienced”, affirms the artist.

“In the beginning you have a very direct relationship with the materials and with your own ghosts, because you have a very pure disposition and many unconnected languages which, in a certain sense, overwhelm you and which you need to order. Over the years, more than forty years of activity through the language of creation I have tried to articulate a discourse of positioning: criticism that is social, aesthetic, utopian and nomadic. Currently with a view of the beginnings.

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<sup>1</sup>Marta Llorente, *Susana Solano. Projects*, Editorial Gustavo Gili, p. 25.

In fact, one of the internal triggers of this exhibition has been, although none of them are part of the show, some recent small bronze pieces whose moulds were made of clay, moulded directly by Solano, who entitled them *Forn* ("Oven"). A memory of the oven and of home baking, a memory of a time recovered and of memories ignored during another equally long time. "A material that has a history in itself," she tells me. "Sustaining yourself from the things that surround you, and from your own everyday actions. Art has a quality in that you do it to show yourself, it offers something at the same time as you get to know yourself and construct yourself"

An attractive loop that, in a way, closes a sustained trajectory that in its final steps returns, now equipped with four decades of experience.

The hard, industrial, pre-existing materials make up the sculptures she exhibited in the 1990s, and are trademark elements for Solano, establish a distance between the sculptor and the piece, "although you can always take them to your territory, in the same way as there are some which drag you to theirs, yes, one sort and the other must be respected. Iron, for example, is more brutalist than clay."

"I was thinking about the relationship of distance, of a physical distance when you have the material and you have it at a distance at the table, so you can work sitting down, although I never do it, and the line of sight encloses you as in a bubble. However, with iron I don't have those sensations. It is there, in the distance, and you move away from it and have to resort to industrial machines. One is linked to the study, the other to the workshop".

"The three pieces from the nineties have been very carefully chosen. When in an exhibition you choose a work made long before, the magic is to look for the relationships between them, the links that are established. These are works in iron that have a complicity with the photographs".

*Puerta del olvido* ("Door of Oblivion") has something of a votive offering, which relates to memory and intimacy. "Yes, and also of destruction, of ruin, as also occurs in the bronze pieces. It is a deconstructed door. The lintel and the jambs. The melancholic touch is in the candles".

*Toma de tierra* ("Earth Connection") includes in its interior some votive offerings that are almost invisible to the viewer as they are wrapped in translucent plastic, which gives them a conceptual relationship to the extinguished candles of *Puerta del olvido*. A silent prayer.

*En busca de un paisaje* ("In Search of a Landscape") is like an altar screen. It has niches with no other votive image than that of the hope of a vision. Thinking about the underground space of the gallery, which is the equivalent of a crypt, the idea arose of including it in the exhibition.

An unsolved plot mystery links the three pieces, *Puerta del olvido*, *Toma de tierra* and *En busca de un paisaje*, as all three offer a reality that in some way blocks our access and forces us to complement them through the personal imagination of each spectator. "These are works open to interpretation because there is no literal plot, no beginning or end, only process. In almost all my works there is a constant, an attitude that develops them".

The importance of the process followed in the realization of the work is just as evident, if not even more so, in the photographic series, in most of which there are biographical links that are more or less marked. The viewer does not have to be aware of these, but knowledge of them widens the resounding symbology that each one of them expresses.

Two of them, *El gran banquete* ("The Great Banquet), 1990-91, and *Vergüenza tomada* ("Shame Felt"), 1996, seem to recall a certain symbology linked in the first case to death, funerary rites and memory, and in the second to a more complex reference connected to the human body, in which there is a process of deconstruction of the male body conceptually similar to what follows with the door form in *Puerta del olvido*.

*Memoria* ("Memory"), 1992-93, offers a vision of statuary that connects with a human face, equally significant and very close to the artist. The statues and the person are always viewed from a low angle, as if they occupy a higher space than that of the viewer. "Statues, like human beings, deteriorate over time and it is this phenomenon that is captured in the shots. A notion of the crumbling of existence.

Finally, *Residencia* ("Residence"), 1996-97, is the most demanding in its idea of process. Each of the six series is the result of using a roll of film, 36 analogical exposures, to take photographs that feature people, moments and banal events that occur daily, over a week of visits to a nursing home. "Nothing is repeated and at the same time everything is cyclical".

I will now repeat a guiding idea that in some way centred part of the text written for that 2016 exhibition and that is even more pertinent in this one and in its intentions. It is this: that if there is a common denominator we can extract from the long and productive trajectory of the artist it is that unforeseen turns have been constantly present in her own biography and she has come to focus both on childhood memories and on the ups and downs that have shaken her existence, including, voluntarily, the painful ones, and always without either one type or the other falling into the narrative of what Susana Solano herself describes as "anecdotes", but transcending them to a symbolic level that viewers can make their own.

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