

in evocations of doubt, ambiguity, and haziness—approximating Wittgenstein's experience just as the breeze from the fan approximates what Dickinson might have felt coming through her bedroom window on a summer's day.

—Ronald Jones

MADRID

Jacobo Castellano

GALERÍA FÚCARES

Jacobo Castellano emerged on the Spanish art scene a decade ago with works that vividly retrace the memory of his early years in the southern region of his native Andalusia. Ever since, the distinctive environment in which Castellano spent his childhood has shaped a powerfully unnerving discourse that unfolds across sculpture, installation, photography, and collage. While not unaffected by international influences, such as that of the austere and metaphorically charged objects of Arte Povera, Castellano's work always bears the weight of his own ambivalent cultural heritage: a gloomy worldview, shaped by the oppressive fear and guilt woven into the dominant religious attitude, which is closer to the morbid contemplation of death than to the joy of living. This sensibility had a profound impact on twentieth-century Spanish art—it can be found in Picasso's early work, both in the crepuscular portraits and interiors of his Blue Period and in the brighter though melancholy scenes of circus characters and street life of his Rose Period. It can also be seen in the dark society depicted in José Gutiérrez Solana's expressionist images and in a myriad of midcentury Spanish



writing, and it echoes through Buñuel's rebellious recapturing of the real. We ineluctably return to it every year in our macabre Easter rituals, and it prompted Castellano to create the ghastly atmospheres he cultivates today.

Childhood and toys have always played a key role in Castellano's aesthetic universe. But instead of examining the nostalgia that such subjects might be expected to evoke, he uses them to explore our uneasy relationship with objects. A typical example was *Casa*, 2004, a huge, awkwardly built, old-fashioned wooden carousel stripped of its seats and ornamentation. Exhibited in Castellano's first show at Galería Fúcares in 2005, it packed the main space, suggesting not a cheerful playtime but a disconcerting experience that probed deep into the realm of the uncanny. In the artist's most recent exhibition, "*Dos de pino*" (Two of Pine), one of the strongest works was *Malos tiempos* (Bad Times), 2009. Here a cardboard horse, which has been ripped open and partially spread out on the floor, supports a tray, also cardboard, on which a glass

of milk rests: a strange conflation of violent effort with anodyne normality. In this piece, Castellano hints at his fascination with the piñata, a common feature of kids' parties in Spain. The memory of this toy also reverberates in *Pelele 01* (The Straw Man 01), 2012, a photograph he recently found and reproduced, in which a stuffed doll is thrown up in the air, evoking the aerial figure of Goya's *El Pelele*, 1771–72.

The body, in Castellano's recent works, is an elusive presence, deeply connected to the domestic props and old pieces of furniture he has worked with in the past. The influence of those Surrealists and Dadaists who shared his morbid obsessions is clearer than ever, particularly in his strategy of deploying fragments so as to contradict their original meanings. In *Bebedor 4* (Drinker 4), 2012, for example, the leg from a statue of Jesus Christ stands upside down on a wooden base, crowned by a metal cup. This weird and imbalanced arrangement dramatically transforms a devotional icon into the souvenir of an unhappy world in which things are left stranded in their latent solitude.

—Javier Hontoria

HEALESVILLE, AUSTRALIA

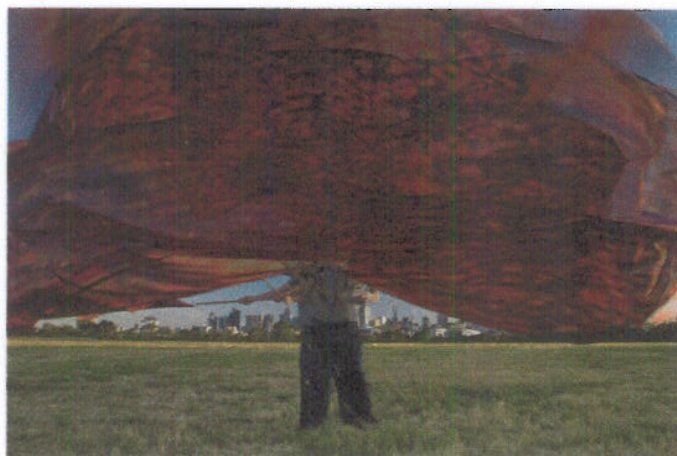
TarraWarra Biennial 2012

TARRAWARRA MUSEUM OF ART

For this carefully modest and constantly thoughtful biennial, titled "Sonic Spheres," a focus on sound art means more than audio booths and noise spill. Exhibited work by twenty individual artists and one collaboration includes scores, drawings on top of scores, aural reinterpretations, and invented musical instruments. Indicating the conflicted and coveted currency of contemporary sound art, catalogue essayist and Sydney-based sound theorist Caleb Kelly disputes the terms of the art world's current preoccupation with sound art altogether, questioning the very value of such a category and noting that its implicit division between the senses promotes the idea that an artwork carrying an audio component is only a novelty.

The exhibition's other catalogue essayist and the biennial's curator, TarraWarra Museum of Art director Victoria Lynn, on the other hand, emphasizes the longevity and durability of all the artists' sonic predilections, dividing sound artists into two broad categories. According to Lynn, the first group experiments with disharmony, noise, and everyday sounds, resulting in forms grounded in chance, asymmetry, and discord. Their work reflects an avant-garde genealogy with which many of the artists in the biennial explicitly identify. In *Mass Black Implosion* (*Mikrokosmos: From the Diary of a Fly*, Béla Bartók), 2012, Marco Fusinato draws over a facsimile score by Bartók, tracing a line from every note toward a central point. Nathan Gray works from Cornelius Cardew's notorious *Treatise*, 1963–67, a 193-page graphic score that resembles a sequence of minimal drawings more than musical notations, creating *Treatise* (Pages 131 and 78), 2012, a suite of sculptural modules and objects that were slowly, studiously, and memorably "played" at the biennial's opening by Gray's own group, A Scratch Ensemble.

Lynn writes that the biennial's second type of artist is "more specifically interested in cultural and linguistic memory—the ways in which music or sound acts as a method of communication across space, through cultures and over time." This approach is exemplified in Tom Nicholson and Andrew Byrne's *Music for an imaginary launch* (*Monument for the flooding of Royal Park*), 2010, a sparse score for eight hands on prepared piano and a recorded female voice. With Nicholson's accompanying videos and a stack of double-sided giveaway posters the work memorializes the layers of indigenous dispossession and white cupidity underlying the pastoral idyll of expansive Royal Park, in inner-city Melbourne.



Tom Nicholson,
*Monument for the
Flooding of Royal Park
(Poster)*, 2011, off-set
print, double-sided
poster, 23½ x 33½".
From the TarraWarra
Biennial 2012.

The works in the biennial thus oscillate between proposing and denying that sounds communicate and that music (or culture) is translatable; which is to say that some artists imagine that sounds crystallize precisely into forms, and others allow that songs are translatable into other media or languages, but only at a cost. In "Sonic Spheres," the first impulse connects works that might otherwise seem incompatible: almost heartbreakingly austere Australian Aboriginal Western Desert paintings and John Nixon's *Silver Monochrome*, 2006–2008 (which is part of a group of enamel-paint-smothered assemblages). Both the Western Desert painters' fields of meandering lines and Nixon's astonishingly delicate silver paintings are, according to the artists, transcriptions of music. The Aboriginal artists translate songs into shimmering maps, and the veteran Melbourne Conceptualist's paintings are analogous to the Cagean scores of experimental music that he has, with shifting teams of collaborators, been performing for decades. In other works, by contrast, sounds and forms obdurately refuse their transformation into one another, and translations are, artists seem to say, misleading even if they become magisterially gorgeous, as in Angelica Mesiti's indelibly haunting *Some Dance to Remember, Some Dance to Forget*, 2012, which features a deeply charismatic young Algerian *rai* balladeer slowly singing a cover version of the Eagles' "Hotel California" in Arabic.

Set in idyllic wine country east of Melbourne, the TarraWarra Museum of Art has not so far been noted for adventurous programming, but "Sonic Spheres" signals a substantial change, for Lynn's show is focused, demanding, and intense. It's a welcome exception to the gargantuan excess and fuzzy theatricality of recent Australian biennials.

—Charles Green

TAIPEI

Taipei Biennial 2012

TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM/THE PAPER MILL

In *The Monster That Is History*, literary scholar David Der-wei Wang considers the *taowu*, an ancient Chinese monster described as "like a tiger with a human face." This fiendish beast was made all the more ominous by its divinatory ability to see both past and future. Ancients cautioned others to "remember and recount [the *taowu*'s] wickedness so as to take precaution," and eventually the *taowu* came to be seen as the embodiment of history itself. This, Wang argues, makes it an adept metaphor for both the violence of twentieth-century Chinese history and the literature that seeks to depict it.

Anselm Franke, curator of this year's Taipei Biennial, takes up this premise in "Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction." With

Wang's book as its point of departure, the exhibition has always been a monster, what new monstrosities wrought? Is the modern monster a different creature, a take to face down the beast? The entirety of the Taipei Museum, including six thematically distinct "mini-museums" located between the main site and an off-site venue housed paper mill, is given over to exploring this question.

Previous editions of the Taipei Biennial have come under criticism for their neglect of local community and history, and this edition not only includes its fair share of Taiwanese art but also precisely—but directly confronts the island's past. In one of the Museum of Infrastructural Unconscious, archival recordings of the public and industrial processes—spanning vastly different conditions—through which Taiwan was built. Kao Chui-chi's *Station Trilogy*, 1987–12, is a video biography of the three-year-old father. The work explores the intersection of life and the broader currents of Chinese history, physics, and a bullet, acquired during a decisive battle during the Chinese Civil War and still lodged in his head.

This biennial often confronts systemic acts of violence and sees as driven by the ruthlessness of rationality. A collection of documents testifying to Taiwanese attempts to develop nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons ("Taiwan WMD," a Museum of the Monster That Is History," compiled by James T. Hong, Tony Wu, and Kelvin Park) illustrates both the political and theoretical stakes in such processes: Taiwan is not officially recognized as a sovereign state, so its ambiguous political status exempts it from international conventions meant to curb the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Ultimately, the exhibition seeks not only to animate the monster that is history but to declaw the beast. The Museum of Antememorialism imagines scenarios in which the creation of memorials might actually serve to prevent the events they commemorate—a monument to the destruction of Hiroshima that might have persuaded Americans not to drop the bomb, for example. It's fanciful, admittedly, and the whimsical Museum of Crossing might be more effective at dispelling some of the misunderstanding that animates so much history. Dedicated in part to George Psalmanazar, a European who lived in the seventeenth century and claimed to be a native of Taiwan, the museum illustrates the apocryphal descriptions of Psalmanazar's *Historical and Geographical Description of the Kingdom of Formosa*. For example, a placard displayed next to a photograph reads, "We eat breakfasts about seven of the clock in the morning; we smoke a pipe of tobacco, then drink bohea, afterward we eat a head of a viper, and suck the blood out of the body; this, in our opinion, is the most wholesome breakfast a man can make." The horror of the foreign is entirely fictional, and monsters are created through simple subversions of history.

