

# JUAN IS JUAN BECAUSE HE IS NOT

By Clara Muñoz

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The search of essentiality is not but the end. The substance of everything with a possibility of being. Maybe a word. That undetermined word which only becomes meaningful in the hand of artists like Juan Hidalgo. Since he is capable to produce reality. The only possible reality, the one which is formed by equivocal objects and by words so distant as they lack in anything but form and topographic representation. Codified words in order to create codes and objects filled with tales and desires, codified too. His name, Juan, also a word, is the recipient of the deepest covetousness of those who, knowing him, are unable to go through the physical threshold of his body. His silence introduces us to a deep knowledge of his artistic world, and his eloquence confound us in the formalities of an exquisite and refined behaviour.

His actions reveal the real nature of objects, their endless interpretation, their absolute dependence upon a form and a name, so that they are invested with indeterminacy in their conceptual liberation, and transformed before our eyes into substance, into something not so convenient, not so suitable, into mere form, bare word.

When I say this I not only mean that Juan Hidalgo is an artist of his time and space, but that his work moves back the space before him and nothing becomes more important than what is incidental, superficial. All geometrical centre could be a perimeter because the names are arbitrary. According to Juan Hidalgo, space acquires, thus, a symbolic nature, movable, transferable and interpretative.

Whereas the names are arbitrary and the words are bestowed with the uncertainty of indeterminacy, and the objects –those wonderful daily objects in the hands of the artist- pervade with narrative elements, the pauses are who invite the onlooker to take part in his work. I am not referring to the strategic pauses that foretell a tragic event, but those which are used as a material, an option, a doorway to chance.

The silence of Juan Hidalgo is what he generously offers to the onlooker, thus becoming the basic element of all indeterminacy. Just like the pauses in Haydn's symphonies *Oxford* and *Cambridge*, like the empty space on the table of Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*, like the space before the waitress of Manet's *Le Folies Bergère*. In all these examples, the artists create a space in the scene so that the observer can take part

in the work, extending the space of the action outside the piece of work, and thus making it participant in each artistic event, and turning the act of beholding into the act, much more committed, of taking part. Daily flux transcends once again from the hands of the artist as far as the boundaries of irony. And at the end everything is brought together and the work disappears. There is nothing left to museum, nothing on scene. There is no work, nor resulting object, everything happens like in a concert.

A group of thirteen folding chairs put together forming a circle, and a vaporiser with boiling water in the centre, this is *Volcán*. Daily flux acquires a symbolic dimension thanks to the mere fact of its relative position. As in the wonderful universe of children, things are what we dream they are. A volcano, so full of heat inside, whose smoke goes out through its wooden crater. With a subtle and polished language it gives life to an orography where the mist floats over its summit creating a perfumed atmosphere. The fantasy that oozes from the work gives us the beauty of secret landscapes in our imagination. Juan Hidalgo knows how to play with the evocative power of the object itself, changing the register of its usual meaning. The use of simple wooden chairs links this work to Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, whereas the repetitive series of an element leads us closer to minimalist propositions. In that intersection of languages whereby the work moves, there is registered the conceptual value of the word as an origin of thinking and of the objects themselves. The word becomes a matter of knowledge and makes us go back to the origin of things, just like the chairs composing the volcano divert us towards the Canary Islands landscape. The surroundings that have seduced Juan Hidalgo to the extent of appeasing his going back home and settling in Ayacata. A chair with a pair of plastic gloves on it gives the proof. The rustic appearance of the piece has the aroma of the hidden Canary he had chosen to live on. There he has built his house stone by stone, timber by timber. Everything disposed so that one can reach the house slowly from the impressive landscape that surrounds it. From this atmosphere is made up the chair. A piece of furniture for the labourer's rest taken from an intimate and violet nook.

The objects become marvellous in the hands of the dreamer. That is why Juan Hidalgo collects what is deprived of the lightest expression, and there he buries a dream, a tale.

He recreates the chest of Sherezade because he knows that there lies the mystery of seduction, the allure of intelligence. The transparent chest hides the secrets of this lucid girl who resorts to the technique of narrative suspense so that, little by little, she is able to keep the king

captivated. There are no jewels or precious stones in the chest, there are memories which are not revealed at any moment. This treasure cannot be listed but by a poet, someone capable to translate the dreams, to delve in the codes of memory. Sherezade hides there these personal objects while she makes up wonderful tales with images that tell us about a world which is sometimes full of magic, whereas other times they are told with full realistic crudeness. The people of Baghdad and Basra are the scenery for all the plot that develops in a nightly intimacy. Juan Hidalgo pays tribute, in this secretive, mysterious piece, to the seductive imagination. I am sure that there will not be any stick, or lever, or burin to open it, he knows that the keyholes of the chests use to be hidden under a lapel, and that they only obey to a secret pressing movement, perhaps a phrase, 'Open Sesame', able to move a rock, or to the sweet words able to open the soul. If there is anyone who is able to find these words, this is him.

In *Esto es lo que queda*, Juan Hidalgo refers us to the moment after the performance, to the time that does not count, to the contour space of the decontextualised object of the action he performed. The table, again a place conceived to lay objects on, is dyed violet. Colour, its colour, acquires a symbolic dimension. Twelve dishes forming a triangle on a table with no chairs prevents a functional relationship. The collection becomes secretive and the order of the objects gets codified. The triangle and the square. Three and four. The rhythmical and geometrical combination that, from a mathematical basis, imposes an order to things. A pillar of the action, it engulfs the keys of the performance that led him to burn tissues, one on each dish. The work invites us to follow the course in reverse order. The finish point, the origin of the action becomes, therefore, uncertain. *Esto es lo que queda* becomes thus into the starting point of a reverse process, of a journey to memory, though with other starting premises that will not determine its meaning and that make complex the conceptual perception, and so makes us restore the process -or rather make it up again- because we lack the information that just only the artist has. This act of taking back the direction of the path in the time and the space lends the work a funeral nuance. The ashes gathered on the dishes make us think about a quick combustion, an ephemeral and intense sparkle. Now, as an object for museums, Time will favour a flux more and more secretive. Like in the moment of death, everything is already past and the ashes stand for it. This is the crucial moment, the inflection point whence the functions become specular, as it happens in his twelve-tone series, his counterpoints or his crabs, in a very long list. Construction and deconstruction of the world having death as start and finish, as a beginning and as an end, as the only possibility of return, as the only

moment for the interpretation of the past, which will be a multiple and varied interpretation because the time will provide more mysteries than solutions, and everything will be invested with new meanings. This is what remains, of what? Since there was not anything in the beginning. Maybe of the mere wish of being or of carrying out an action completely void of content, undetermined, readable, but acutely structured in the time and the space.

Once again, there is the chair, this time in the gallery Arteleku; but the object has disappeared and we find a silk screen print replacing it. *Sentado en una silla en Arteleku* is completed with a series of images of the wonderful drawings by Jean Jacques Lequeu –the French revolutionary architect- ordered according to the compositional structure of a score by Rose Sèlavy. The sounds and the silences are represented through coloured spaces and images. The series lean on numbers that make up the sound weave, the latter formed by the first five notes of the diatonic scale. Numbers, sounds, architectures, forms and colours organise in a common order, through a similar creative process. The different silk screen prints shape a kaleidoscope where the forms succeed each other gathering in different ways, repeating, enlarging the size of the drawings. Juan Hidalgo did this work during one of the courses he gave in Donostia. The chair in Arteleku could be the figured scenery whence the artist talks about art, about that space –by him inhabited- where music, action, photography, object, sculpture, drawing... can live together, because Juan Hidalgo assumes the world of art as an open land to express himself. 'The basis of creative techniques can be applied to any sort of language, no matter if you work with sounds, volumes, spaces or words'.<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) Muñoz, Clara: "La economía de medios ha sido una constante en mi trabajo". Interview to Juan Hidalgo, Revista Anarda, June 2001, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.