

MORE GRAVITY

The individual exhibition by June Crespo, held at the Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (CA2M), brings together the artist's latest investigations into the sculptural object. These pieces, which were produced specifically for the exhibition, distil the working methods, motifs and forms of exhibiting that Crespo has been testing and implementing over the last decade. The aim of the present text is to outline these methodologies and discuss how they relate to the work of other artists from different historical and artistic contexts. Furthermore, the text highlights the recurrent gestures in Crespo's work, and their links with previous pieces. Finally, it looks into how the artist displays her sculptural work, particularly in the exhibitions immediately before this one at CA2M. Thus, the present text is not an analysis of the exhibition, but rather a series of overlapping layers which, when considered together, suggest one possible way (among others) of approaching Crespo's oeuvre. The ideas put forward in the text have come from conversations, exchanges and shared readings, as well as from the work process leading up to *They Saw Their House Turn Into Fields*. The reason for choosing this particular approach was not to offer a meticulous account of the show, but rather to ensure that the writing process was as close as possible to the artist's own creative process. The starting point for this exercise, therefore, was to respect the interstitial spaces of both Crespo's practice and her sculptures, and, at the same time, look even further into the sensitive nature of her work. The text eschews any descriptive or argumentative tone; the objective, instead, was to delve deeper into the exhibition *They Saw Their House Turn Into Fields*, as well as into Crespo's earlier works, by embracing their nuances and opening them up to multiple possible readings.

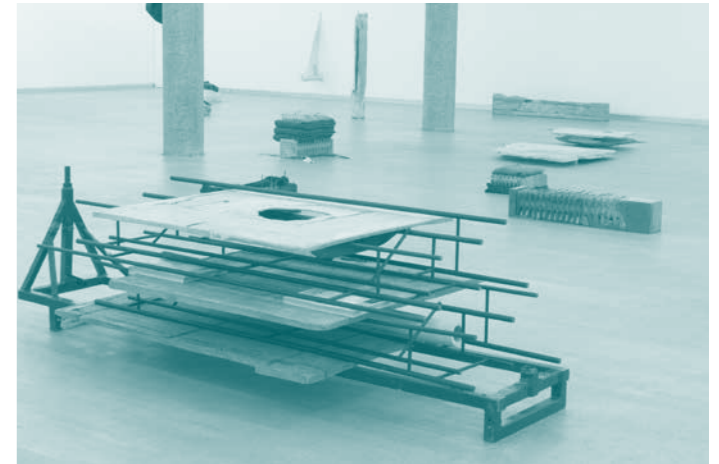


Fig. 11 June Crespo, *Expansión horizontal*, 2017. Photograph: Daniel Mera. Courtesy: CarrerasMugica gallery

CIRCULATION AS A MOTIF

In 2015, June Crespo found herself in Amsterdam, to participate in a residency at De Ateliers.¹ At that time, she was working on a series of cement pieces, made from moulds of legs and torsos. The model for this group of floor sculptures, titled *Cheek to Cheek* (fig.1), was a mannequin that Crespo had come across by chance. This mannequin had “well-defined



forms, which contrasted with the fact that it was cut-off at the waist, like a rock smashed into pieces.”²

It is somewhat striking that just when Crespo was working with moulds and sections of mannequins, she was also developing another group of pieces related to the architecture of her studio. *Expansión horizontal* (*Horizontal Expanse*, fig.11) reflects the artist’s interest in the infrastructural side of space, and the corresponding elements. The piece is made from castings of different floors, laid on top of each other. Crespo’s idea was to force observers to look at the work from above, and thus create the illusion that the observer’s gaze could pierce through the ground and reveal what lies beneath it.

The pieces in the 2016 exhibition *Chance Album nº 1*³ (fig. 2) also reflect that same interest; in this case, radiators were the main element. Crespo would also go on to use radiators in later works, casting them from moulds and presenting them as free-standing sculptures, but in this particular exhibition they were used to hold up an image, that of an ear. Among the many elements used by Crespo in *Chance Album nº 1*, there was a series of extruded clay tubes, with the same diameter as the piping found in domestic heating systems.

It would appear that the duct or the tube, as conductive elements, emerged as recurrent motifs in Crespo’s work just when her pieces were beginning to show a pronounced interest in taking apart the image of the body.⁴ This development shouldn’t be particularly surprising: these kinds of ducts are in fact a reference to the outer skins of buildings, i.e. their systems of conduction, evacuation and climatization: when attached to the wall or built into the ground, these systems function like extensions of the body.

The references to the interstitial spaces of architecture, and to what is concealed therein, weave a web of associations between the tectonic and the physiological, linked to the domestic environment, which blurs the lines between the organic and the industrial. So, with regards to the processes behind Crespo’s sculptural work, or in terms of the artist’s favourite motifs, to make a distinction between house and body, or rather, perhaps, between flesh and stone, misses the point. Instead, the mixing of such motifs reflects the artist’s urge to question this strict compartmentalisation.

On the one hand, Crespo’s sculptures are built from industrially-produced elements, although their designs deal with issues such as ergonomics — i.e. how they accommodate the body — and formal organicity. On the other hand, plant elements like flowers, which take up a central space in *They Saw Their House Turn Into Fields*, are embedded within the exhibition’s very discourse: they are made by high-tech systems of production and representation, systems which sever these plants from any kind of *natural* order. Thus, the mannequins and the ducts, the toilets and the flowers, all show how the artist explores a type of object-body in transit, which, after it has been broken down, rejects any fixed identity, any gender and even any meaning. This approach does, however, propose a form of relation: “I tend not to read the

objects, but rather perceive them in a very physical way. In terms of their sizes, my works generally adhere to the human scale: for me, that body-to-body relation is important.”⁵

Even so, motifs are never “just motifs”, and they don’t turn up randomly. A symbolic analysis of these motifs is probably not the right way to approach them, and nor should they be classified taxonomically, given that their origin is in fact botanical, as is the case of the sculptures produced for the exhibition at CA2M.⁶ Here, these flowers are presented as polysemic entities. It is one single flower, and it is all flowers — or, in other words, it is no flower. But, aside from how they are represented, in these motifs we can discern a pattern of usage that does not hinge on their origins. If we look to the constructive strategies that the artist usually works with — i.e. assemblage and the combining of different materials — these motifs show a deliberate de-hierarchisation and, when they are based on utilitarian objects, a breakdown of their functional character. This shaking-up of the order is achieved by making marked changes in scale, and by using moulds, fragmentation and iteration.

Crespo’s approach is an amalgamation of procedures that works like an effective strategy for abstraction, allowing the artist to play around with the meanings attributed to said motifs. This is perhaps evident in the artist’s aforementioned work with mannequins, since these objects undoubtedly partake in manufacturing consensus about the normative representation of bodies. As Linda Nochlin notes, postmodernity brought with it a series of representations of the body whereby it came to be solely conceived of as something in pieces.

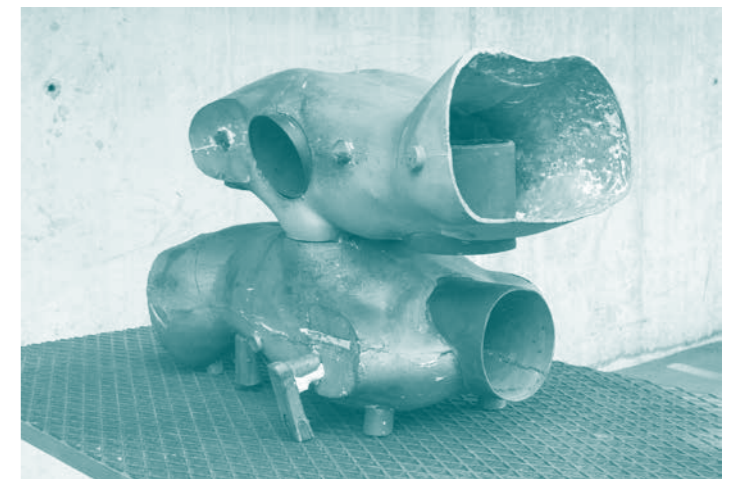


Fig. 12 June Crespo, *Helmets IX* (detail), 2022. Photograph: Ander Sagastiberri

That is, the simple idea of a perfectly unified subject, of unambiguous gender, was deemed suspect.⁷ Rosi Braidotti discusses this kind of fragmentation of the body, though she does not focus solely on the representations of it: Braidotti also highlights the paradox caused by the simultaneous overexposure of the body and the loss of any kind of consensus in terms of its undivided, unitary value.⁸ By using fragmentation and seriation, Crespo proposes unique configurations and analogies that, in their very strangeness, point to the body’s elemental and functional character, and to its non-unitary condition: “The new form gradually shakes off the character of the original mannequin, moving away from that exterior, stereotyped image of the body. I thus try to form a different object that works like a duct, in which the union of its interior and exterior, though the holes, is key.”⁹



Therefore, and as can be seen in both *Horizontal Expanse* and *Helmets* (fig. 12), Crespo emphasises the negative spaces that define torsos and legs, reducing them to skins and carcasses. These orifices and hollowed-out spaces enable circulation, be it of the hand, of the eye or of other materials. The orifice, then, becomes the true motif and main motivation for Crespo's sculpture: it opens up a whole field of investigation, in which empty space is understood as a constructive element in its own right. It is deemed an effective strategy for generating form, while also breaking down its image.

THE WRONG WAY

The act of hollowing-out — so crucial in the artistic language of June Crespo — rekindles certain debates that had arisen back when sculpture was undergoing a progressive dematerialisation. In this sense, and without seeking to propose an excessively disciplinary and ordered interpretation of the artist's work, Crespo's sculptures serve as the basis for a re-evaluation of ideas that, from the 1960s onwards, moved sculpture away from its representative and monolithic function. As the curator Okwui Enwezor has noted, the sculptural object that emerged from those ideas "continuously extends the public's own perception of the works which are positioned, as it were, between act and making, the sculptural and performative, the retinal and haptic".¹⁰

Despite the fact that Crespo's work enters into dialogue with key episodes in the development of sculpture as a practice, this interpretation is by no means presented as an exercise in nostalgia, or as an operation for revival; instead, this reading accepts the contradictions, and shows the flaws. Crespo makes use of these precepts in a somewhat looser way, bringing them in as paradigms that allow for a range of forms to be generated. The artist's dialogue with these conceptual models is what defines her practice, which resists

being pinned-down to the present day: it includes nods to the history of sculpture, as well as to earlier stages in the artist's own research. In this sense, the exhibition at CA2M connects with two sets of previous works by Crespo, in which the artist went back over ready-established ideas such as the active void, estrangement, haptic perception or fragmentation. The common denominator is that both sets of sculptures establish a direct relationship with the wall, and in doing so they



Fig. 13 June Crespo, *Axes* (Amsterdam May 17–Bilbao Nov 18) (detail), 2018. Photograph: Carlo Favero. Courtesy: P420 gallery

emphasise the relationship between architecture and sculpture. In the context of the CA2M exhibition, these works took shape as forms that strain as they emerge from the wall, "as a kind of life force"¹¹, and also as perforations in the wall, as a way to activate areas of the building that are otherwise hidden.

The first of these sets of sculptures, which served as a starting point, was called *No osso* ("In The Bone"; fig. 3), in which the central space was presented as if it were a blind orifice. Some of the pieces, subtitled *Occipital*, were attached to the wall, and they make reference to the interstitial space between the cranium and the first vertebra of the backbone. The sculptures connect "an internal physical space and a specific physical space of the architecture. By hollowing out a space in this architecture, it can be expanded."¹² Its forms, or its empty space, are defined using casts of toilets. Again, Crespo avoids making any distinction between original and derived forms, and, as with other elements that she appropriates, she uses toilets to pose questions about the generative use of objects which, having been intervened upon by the artist, acquire a new sculptural dimension.

In the series *Axes* (fig. 13), however, Crespo activates opposing forces. These works are made from steel rods and textiles, and here the negative space is drawn in the tension exerted upon the fabric. These textiles are attached to the wall at one end, and to the apex of the metal rod (concrete dowels or piping) at the other, and they look like tautened skins or membranes. The precedent for these pieces is in fact a series of sculptures in which a protuberant object, such as a vase, is fixed to the wall. The object is then covered with a t-shirt or shirt, in such a way that produces tension (fig. 4).

The rotund, ample forms in *No osso* contrast with those in *Axes*: these latter sculptures, with all their pointiness, are completely different to the former, which are more enveloping. Despite the fact that, spatially, both sets are like an incision, they produce different effects. In *No osso*, the eye turns into an active subject; by looking, the observer goes inside the sculptural object. In *Axes*, however, the eye becomes a passive subject and is thus the potential recipient of the action, i.e. to be pierced.

In these works, but also in the pieces featured in the series *Instrumentos y fetiches* ("Instruments and Fetishes", fig. 14) or *Ser dos* ("To Be Two", fig. 5), the visual relations proposed by the sculpture are manifested as a series of foreshortened overlapping planes. This reduced, dizzying perspective



Fig. 14 June Crespo, *Instrumentos y fetiches*, 2017–18. Photograph: Daniel Mera. Courtesy: CarrerasMugica gallery



makes the sculpture somewhat tricky for the eye to interpret, and thus encourages the viewer to approach it in different ways. Crespo thus stresses the difference between sculpture as image and sculpture as language. According to the sculptor Phyllida Barlow, the development of the latter can be traced from the Palaeolithic period right up to the present day, and its key characteristic is that the resulting sculptures are unyielding in the way that they refuse to offer a single, optimal view.¹³

As the viewer gets nearer or further away from these sculptures, observing them from multiple different angles, the works' true, rich complexity is revealed. Furthermore, other qualities such as opacity and clarity come into play, i.e. considering what can be seen and what is concealed. This organisation of the visual experience seems to refer to the haptic and erotic qualities of the audiovisual medium.¹⁴ Furthermore, by displaying the sculptures on the wall, i.e. in direct contact with the place's architecture, Crespo precludes them from any strict classification: they cannot be walked around, so they cannot be considered free-standing. And, due to their excessive protuberance, they're not reliefs either. They all raise issues about the perceptive turn caused by the way they are attached to the space. When sculpture is placed on the wall, does it assume the role of accessory or decoration? Does the wall limit its scope of action?

Even though *Axes* and *No osso* describe directionally opposite energies — going from or towards the wall — they share the same purpose: to eroticise the wall. It's about neutralising the oppressive character of the wall, insomuch as a form for containment, and exploring its plasticity as a porous.

The modern movement established an antagonistic relationship with a series of elements which — although they do not have a strictly functional function, as it were — were able to modify how architecture is used, alter its appearance or even confer it new meaning. As Sylvia Lavin notes, modern architects focused a lot of their efforts on emphasising the structural function of their buildings, preventing other sculptural or visual elements from interfering in the composition and interpretation of the architectural space.¹⁵

Plasticity, according to Lavin, both constitutes and exceeds modernism, simultaneously. The fluidity of the decorative and material programmes is the embodiment of an approach that was otherwise repressed by the modern obsession for structure and formal regulation.¹⁶

Lavin sets out an asymmetrical relationship between modern architecture and fine art: the former assigned a stable character to the loadbearing elements, while other



Fig. 15 Lynda Benglis, *Adhesive Products*, 1971. Photograph: Erik Sutherland. Courtesy: Walker Art Center

elements, i.e. those not classed as strictly functional, were deemed disposable, superfluous and erratic. As Lavin says, it was only in the 1960s, following the widespread use of polymers and resins, that architecture would take on a more playful, dissolute character, giving rise to interior spaces that really did champion an extravagant plasticity.

In the late 1960s, the American sculptor Lynda Benglis began a series of specific interventions that she referred to as “frozen gestures”, in which she started using polyurethane foam as a work material (fig.15). This material allowed her to elaborate a typology of sculptures that have a certain ambiguity to them: they are voluminous but light, threatening but welcoming, violent but sensual.

Benglis sought to connect and express, simultaneously, both the horror and the powerful magnificence of natural phenomena such as lava eruptions, gravitational pull or wave turbulence. The aforementioned pieces emerged from the artist's interest in certain phenomena which, paradoxically, we tend to classify as supernatural. These phenomena are especially disturbing when considered from an urban context, i.e. one which is cut off from the vast, timeless natural environment.¹⁷

In the late 1960s, Eva Hesse made a series of works using materials such as fibreglass and latex, the qualities of which defined, to a large extent, the character of her sculptures. These materials worked like collaborators, dictating the final configuration of the pieces, giving the sculptures their own particular colouring or making them fragile. As with Benglis's sculptures, Hesse's works largely reflect the relationship between a material and its gravity. In fact, Hesse explored at great length the relationships between the vertical and horizontal planes, in pieces that stretch out from the wall until they reach the ground. One such work, in which the artist would push this relationship to its limit, is *Expanded Expansion* (1969), a modular piece presented as a draped false wall. In Lucy Lippard's essay on the artist, she would claim that this piece “is just as absurdly redundant as the title”.¹⁸ Its form, as a retractable wall, implies that this sculpture can contract and expand, and its modular composition creates the illusion that it could extend on forever. Even so, the redundancy mentioned by Lippard is not only about the work's excessive linear length, but it also seems to refer to its plasticity and how absurd it is to add a complex surface, in the form of curtains, atop a perfectly constructed and firm white wall.

The exceptionality of both of these interventions is not solely a matter of their colossal size. It is also particularly striking that, just when Benglis and Hesse were working on their two pieces, sculpture was reclaiming the floor as its preferred space for action. According to Briony Fer, the phasing out of sculptures' plinths (and other structures that ready them for the onlooker's

gaze) is what led to them acquiring a presence all of their own. This progressive elimination led to the disappearance of many mental structures, too: like a kind of barrier, devices like plinths had essentially set apart the sculp-



tural object from all other objects: “Now, anything can be sculpture.”¹⁹

As with the pieces in *No osso* and *Axes*, the sculptures by Benglis and Hesse do not easily fit into any fixed category. They’re not reliefs, nor free-standing sculptures. Both their arrangement and their final form depend, to a large extent, on the architecture of the space in question. This, combined with their voluptuous presence, suggests that both interventions behave like counter-gestures, challenging the norms. They challenge the idea that all sculpture in direct contact with the wall is subordinate to the structural function of said wall. They also challenge the idea that any sculpture not standing on the floor, that doesn’t simply blend in, thus takes on a weak position by default, that it becomes ornamental, or less like a sculpture and more like an image.

With their bold monumentality, the “frozen gestures” of Benglis and the “expanded expansion” of Hesse could be understood as gestures aimed at reappropriating the wall, for the exploration of a sculptural typology that regards the wall not as a limit, but rather as an active collaborator that can in fact broaden out sculpture’s potential scope. By exploring the plasticity of the wall, both artists seem determined to present its forces in a more abstract way, yet without forgoing its structural condition.

COVERING

“My work process often begins when I become obsessed with a certain object, and I start observing its forms. Discovering what they speak to me about, or how they look at me, is what ties me to them. Similarly, when I was working on this exhibition, I kept going back to certain images: the intimate contact relationship between the tongue and the palate, or between the eyelid and the eyeball; the contact between fine skins and commissures, or between the petals of a flower. I’ve also gradually identified something common to a number of different pieces, and that’s a kind of firmness, a kind of straining. Like a horse, pulling forward.”²⁰

In Crespo’s work, the materials, be they scraps or garments, form part of a lexicon with contradictory consistencies. In the two exhibitions immediately before *They Saw Their House Turn Into Fields*, the artist made a series of sculptures in which the textile elements were brought to the fore. This change of function is partly due to their greater degree of complexity and formal definition. To make these works, Crespo used patterns, as well as industrial techniques such as pleating, thereby disassociating these fabrics from the category of “found object”. Thus, in pieces such as *The same heat (poppy)* (fig. 6), the textile reveals a conflict between forms (i.e. the form of the prefabricated clothing and that of the loadbearing elements), while in the pieces presented by the artist at the exhibition *entre alguien y algo* (“between someone and something”, fig. 16), chiffons and tulle are more prominent, in some cases comprising the main material of the sculpture.

Thus, the pieces do not renounce the expressiveness of the pleating, and they exhibit the quality of the material, the consistency of its warp, as well as its weight and transparency. The colours of the fabrics were chosen very carefully, and they tinge the sculptures in hues of rose, beige, carmine and electric blue. The work’s redundancy, and elaborate flamboyance, places it somewhere between funny and erotically suggestive, i.e. markedly human.²¹ With their fanciful appearances, as they fall and swirl, these textiles are strategic in the activation of interstitial spaces that function like connective tissues or membranes. At times, they look like strange petals, like commissures or drapery.

Just as curtains stop being *simple* pieces of fabric when there is the possibility of action — i.e. opening or closing — the way Crespo uses textiles in her sculptures is not just about their materiality, but rather about certain performative qualities too. Curtains are choreographed architectures, and their trajectories in space delimit areas of exception and exclusion. When, for example, curtains are opened on a stage, they declare the possibility of presence and representation. But, as with windows or doors, curtains are also devices that mediate between the interior and exterior, and, as such, they are given the function of permitting or denying access, of setting a limit.

By using these fabrics, Crespo alters the perceptive and visual conditions; it’s as if they’re closed eyelids, blocking the view of something. At the same time, the fabrics are used like editing tools for sculpture: they are a strategy for cutting, merging and transitioning between different materials.

Furthermore, by hiding certain things, the artist reduces the role of the eye: now decentralised, it is not solely in charge of fathoming the form before it. By rejecting an ocular-centric way of interpreting of the work, and highlighting the opacity of the sculptural object, Crespo reiterates the important haptic qualities of sculpture and, simultaneously, she alters the basis upon which we establish a division between interiority and exteriority, between seeing, glimpsing and intuiting.

The video *Zwei Frauen im Gefecht* (“Two Women in Combat”, 1974, fig. 7), by Isa Genzken, depicts a banal action — dressing and undressing — in a humorous tone.



Fig. 16 June Crespo, *Velos primitiva*, 2022, and *Velos invierno*, 2022. Photograph: Ander Sagastiberri. Courtesy: CarrerasMugica gallery





Fig. 17 June Crespo, *Untitled* (scan), 2020

The narration is simple, and we see Genzken and Susan Grayson standing in front of large windows. The camera shoots them full-length. It all takes place mechanically. Grayson is wearing her skirt as a cape; she undresses, and Genzken dresses. At one point, one of them lifts up the shirt to make sure she doesn't put it on inside out. Grayson gives her skirt to Genzken, who puts it on. Grayson, now completely naked, observes Genzken, who is fully dressed.

The action would be entirely irrelevant if it weren't being filmed. The shirt and the skirt, that they both share, harbour the possibility of an activation; their clothes are part of a game, a transformation. Their bodies fade away when the two are undressed; they become present again when they are being covered and uncovered.

As in other pieces by Genzken which are structured around one and the same motif or exercise, in this video the action brings into play a series of "transformative variations": in this

case, they show the body as a stable unit, as a structure. By proposing a parametric system, based on an arbitrary use of clothing, Genzken proposes a transformation based on the freedom of action, designed to mould the presence of the bodies.²³ The performative character of the piece — the combat referred to in its title — undoubtedly backs up the idea that nudity is not a state, but rather an event, and by no means is it a form or a stable possession.²⁴ Similarly, when June Crespo dresses her sculptures, she does so as if it were a reversible action: covering, and uncovering. Or when, in her studio, she scans jumpers, shirts and other used garments (fig. 17), she outlines the trajectory of an action: that of her own body, being covered by these clothes.

Pieces such as *velos (párpados)* ("veils (eyelids)", fig. 8) should be regarded in the knowledge that something might occur, i.e. by paying attention to its performative nature. But they should also be seen as an exploration of the transformative character of sculpture, which, for Crespo, is a broad field of investigation. The successive "variations" that she applies to one and the

same piece are not done for the sake of adding further complexity; rather, they are a way of carrying out this practice in a less rigid way, to loosen up the gesture and give the sculpture the opportunity to reappear. If we take into consideration the words of Merleau-Ponty, when he says that "to restore is never to reestablish; it is to mask",²⁵ then the act of covering is not meant to compose a form, but rather to recompose a presence. The attention is therefore not focused on deciding what is to be left uncovered and what is to be hidden; instead, it is about restoring an opacity which, paradoxically, is what allows the sculpture to appear in its entirety.

Julia Spínola is a sculptor with whom Crespo has regular contact, in the form of conversations, meetings or texts like the one in the present publication. Spínola describes the act of observing her own pieces in the studio as an exercise in focusing on something in a state of tension, in a position of (friendly) *combat*. Spínola situates her practice in a state of "not-knowing", or, as she herself notes while citing Deleuze, in a state where an ethics of distance is brought into play.²⁶ This way, she doesn't have to lock in any specific image of her sculptures; they are thus entities without a fixed, definitive presence.

In the case of Elena Aitzkoa, another artist whose practice addresses similar concerns to those in Crespo's work, her pieces do not stick to a pre-planned strategy. "I set about manipulating a range of materials, I make a series of decisions as I go, because everything speaks to me. Actions that won't even be seen: sticking your finger in, making an effort. My sculptures have a lot of life in them, and there's an ongoing transferral of elements between pieces. It might appear that I've got one, two, three pieces finished, but in the end, in the heat of the moment, I might have a sudden outburst, and those pieces disappear."²⁷

All three artists, Crespo, Spínola and Aitzkoa, emphasise the contingent nature of sculpture. They present this contingency as a factor found not only in the material aspects, i.e. in the relationship between matter, action and reaction, but as something also found within certain less tangible aspects, disassociated from the idea of linear, progressive construction. Their work processes do not follow a straight line; these processes are often manifested, in the exhibition, as the testimony of an ongoing investigation. Their sculptures hardly ever leave the workspace as defined, finished entities: instead, they continue reacting, appearing or disappearing, depending on where and how they are displayed. It is no surprise that these three artists often experiment with different ways to display sculpture, ways that can even challenge the accepted notion of what an exhibition space is. Sometimes they might install pieces in unconventional spaces, or their exhibitions might be reframed as a kind of "act". Nor is it a surprise that Aitzkoa speaks of a rapturous

"outburst" when describing the emotion she feels just before the sculpture disappears. It is worth thinking about whether that emotion is caused by the emergence of an image, i.e. experiencing a form of clairvoyance that



stabilises the forms and inhibits feelings. The essential issue, the fundamental problem that gives the practice its *raison d'être*, is working out how to re-establish the presence of the sculptural object.

DORMANT, MORDANT

In the exhibitions *entre alguien y algo*²⁸ and *Acts of Pulse*,²⁹ Crespo focused on the relationships between wall and sculpture. Despite the fact that, in both exhibitions, the use of the central space in the gallery was essential, a good number of the sculptures were attached directly to the wall. In these exhibitions, Crespo experimented with a way of displaying her work that she would then push to the limit in *They Saw Their House Turn Into Fields*. One of the main ideas for this exhibition was to dispense with any floor-based works, and thus allow visitors to move uninterrupted around the space, so they could get closer to and further away from the sculptures at will.

In *entre alguien y algo*, the relationship with the wall was built using textile elements, while in *Acts of Pulse* the sculpture took on a cinematic quality. Again, Crespo used moulds of one particular object — riding saddles — and she installed the sculptures around the perimeter. By placing them on the same visual plane, these sculptures seemed to describe the trajectory of the saddle, in space. But they also offered an account of the distinct visual and spatial relations that the artist identifies in the objects that she shares her studio with. Moving around these objects, and observing them from different distances and perspectives, is what allows these sculptures to “appear”. This movement is what causes the chair to stop being a chair (and the same happens with the other motifs). June Crespo’s sculptures document, to a large extent, these visual encounters, which are the product of spatial relations. Thus, in *Acts of Pulse*, those encounters, arranged sequentially, reflect Crespo’s interest in a set of visual relations that remain mostly hidden, i.e. those formed in the contact between the tongue and the palate during the act of speech. The positions and connections between these two parts of the mouth can vary considerably depending on the pronunciation, even if the aim is to make the same sound.

Alongside these two exhibitions, in summer 2022 Crespo would present, in the square at the entrance to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, *Core*. This intervention brought together a set of concrete sculptures, based on casts of steel drums. While making these pieces, the artist made, alongside the filmmaker Maddi Barber, a film



Fig. 18 June Crespo, Maddi Barber, *Core* (still) 2022

of the same name, in which she documented the production process.

The film — which uses close-ups (fig. 18), centred on the observation of the materials — goes over the different processes involved in the making of the sculptures, from the extraction of the raw material, to its mixing, processing and, finally, its consolidation. As well as documenting this process, the film takes an unusual approach to June Crespo’s work, treating it as the generator of a moving image. Furthermore, the film reflects a particular interest in the vitalism of materials. As Crespo notes, “there, within the material, is its form”. Thus, the video focuses on those phases of the matter in which the work’s form is still latent, that is, when there are still infinite possibilities for its eventual outcome.

Similarly, in the video included as part of the installation *Das wilde Lieben* (*Wild Loving*, 1984, fig. 9), the artist Miriam Cahn documented, in her own studio, the process of transforming matter by repeating the same action.

At the top of the frame, we see Cahn’s bare feet. Her hands come into the shot, carrying a block of plasticine. She drops it to the ground, with force, so the plasticine starts to warm up, becoming more ductile, and the block is soon turned into a long, winding tail. When Cahn decides the action is complete, the plasticine has the same blackish colour as the charcoal dust that completely covers the studio floor. The block now looks like a lethargic snake, or like the nervate pistil of a flower, thicker at the base, tapered at the end.

As June Crespo notes, with regards to Cahn’s video: “The action itself is what determines the final object. A materialisation of the gesture. The object is thus inseparable from the action that has shaped it. It is perceived as materiality, marked by an action, and also as an entity in its own right, the signifier of something else. Its ‘coming into being’ is embodied in the enraptured presence of the ‘I am’. The evolution of its own transformation and duration are compressed into the object’s very coordinates. They are the extension of corporal motion, which is inextricably bound to human bodily movement.”

The movement duly becomes the driving force behind the form; in this case, the movement is based on a mechanical and elemental gesture which references ancient technologies for processing material, i.e. gathering and throwing. By applying a force upon a material, rhythmically, the material responds, depending on its own toughness; it either becomes more elastic, or breaks into pieces.

For June Crespo, what Cahn shows in *Das wilde Lieben* is not simply the process of forming a sculpture, but rather the proof that sculpture exists as variables, and that one material is both brick and pistil at the same time. But, as Crespo notes, Cahn’s rhythmic trance blurs the limits between the sculptural object and the artist’s own body, as if one were the extension of the other. Cahn commits to the material, she blends into it, and the resulting form



is a testament to that commitment. Similarly, the basis of Crespo’s practice is to keep going back to the same motif, but not to further strengthen it, rather to spark a transformation.

In *Acts of Pulse* and *They Saw Their House Turn Into Fields*, the use of materials such as steel, aluminium and fibreglass meant that the transformation of the object required more time, so a less immediate relationship with the material was established. Casting is a slow, arduous process, of considerable technical complexity, which requires specific knowledge and numerous people. Technical skill is what guarantees the material's stability and durability, and this skill ensures that the metal translates, faithfully, the shape given to it by the moulds. No wonder, then, that most of the imaginary associated with the lost-wax casting of sculptures is linked with their immutability over time. Also, inversely, when a metal surface is irregular, with small cuts or cracks, it's to be expected that such imperfections suggest a possible accident. Crespo's sculptures are thus presented as the container of two conflicting timeframes. The first of these timeframes is extremely slow, i.e. the one related to the moulding and casting. Meanwhile, in the second one, the artist defines the sculpture's ultimate appearance in a more direct way: "Suddenly, something opens up [...] I can then start removing things, until only what's necessary is left."³⁰

Throughout this process, Crespo pays particular attention to the relations of addition and subtraction that take place when the sculptures are cast, unmoulded, moved or simply stored away. Sometimes, the casting process can lead to accidental developments: a range of unforeseen forms might emerge by chance, which the artist then includes in the piece. Similarly, certain functional elements (such as parts of the moulds, spouts, or remains of the ceramic coating) can get stuck to the surface of the sculpture during the casting process, and are only partially removed. In other cases, the sculpture's character comes about following an observation process which is resolved by taking it apart, by recombining it, by finding its right position or making a place for it.

STAYING STANDING

June Crespo did not curtail her sculptures according to the restrictions of the exhibition space, but rather she accepted the limits of the architectural space as guidelines that would inform the layout of the exhibition. These guidelines suggested relationships between the sculptures, and they made Crespo's previous investigation work, that had led to this group of pieces, all the more evident. Thus, Crespo's wall-based work was not driven by a desire for integration, that is, to ensure that the architectural conditions of the space perfectly met the demands of the sculpture — instead, the artist understood the space's non-specificity as something that could intervene and collaborate in the overall dramaturgy of the exhibition.

By displaying how the pieces are attached to the wall, i.e. with slings, Crespo integrated these holding mechanisms by addressing their very



Fig. 19 June Crespo, *Untitled (Voy, si)*, 2020. Photograph: Jonás Bel. Courtesy: Galería Erhardt Flórez

language, so that they might also play a role in shaping the final form of the sculptures, as a kind of exoskeleton. Furthermore, these elements add a colour range — fluorescent orange, electric blue, pearly grey — which, as with other textile elements, contrasts with the mineral and brittle textures of the steel and aluminium. The slings attach to the skin of the sculpture, and the lines of force they trace make it hard to distinguish between the merely structural and the potentially ornamental. By blurring the

boundaries between the two, Crespo also tempers their auratic qualities. By exposing how they are held up, the interdependent nature of sculpture is made more evident, and the forces it contains — infrastructural, load-bearing and distributed — are thus more visible.

Generally speaking, these technical considerations (about how sculpture are installed) are not particularly important, especially when the sculpture's dimensions mean it can be manipulated, installed and transported without much fuss. The smaller the size of the sculpture, the less gravity it has, and it thus requires less force to keep it up. However, despite those elemental considerations, June Crespo tends to put these systems for holding or attachment on display. Sometimes, the straps, harnesses or washers are embedded into the piece itself so that it can be hung up, or perhaps they serve as a reminder of the long-gone things they've held up in the past. By exploring their plasticity, Crespo does away with the ideals of efficiency and concealment that normally govern the use of attachment systems, and she thereby reverses their original function: said attachments are normally concealed so as not to interfere with the interpretation of the sculpture, or even to give it a certain weightless quality.

In *They Saw Their House Turn Into Fields*, the size and weight of the sculptures, and the architectural traits of the space, were all conducive to showing what holds the structures up. By insistently drawing lines of force from the sculpture to the walls and ceiling, it might seem that their size and weight are the result of a miscalculation. But to accept this assumption would be to overlook the vast difference between the notions of scale and size. While



scale is always relative, size is stable. When June Crespo alters the scale of objects such as shoes (fig. 19) or flowers, she does so in order to set out a new relationship between these objects and other objects. Thus, while size

is defined by the entity's capacity of occupation (that is, by the physical space it takes up), scale is only established through a confluence, or in other words, as a sum or relationship between spaces.

June Crespo's sculptures, given their monumental scale, reside in an ambiguous space. Despite the fact that they impose a distance, they should be considered taking the body as a reference point and focusing, up-close, on the complexity of their surfaces or even the temperature of their materials. Their extreme delicateness and their force go beyond human attributes and abilities — therefore, these pieces might well be destined for the imaginary of the monstrous and the ominous. The words “monument” and “monster” do in fact derive from the same Latin verb: *monere*, i.e. to remind, to warn. And monsters are, of course, unstable and transitory entities. If these works were to be repurposed as monuments, they would in fact commemorate that desire to exist as an organ open to the world, much like an ear or a flower.

When in Amsterdam, June Crespo set out to make a herbarium: “For a few months, I loved going home at night and stealing some flowers on the way. In Amsterdam there are so many of them. As an activity, it was nothing like that conscious moment of ‘working on a piece’.” As is often the case, some work processes or, in this instance, the gathering of materials, do not find their place or purpose until some time has passed. The same thing happens with sculpture, i.e. with that which appears to have found its form. According to Crespo, some sculptures only find their place and gravitational centre a few months or even years after they are declared finished, such as when moving studios. One might think that the environmental conditions, or the confluence with other objects, is what makes a certain piece look different over time. Whatever it may be, for Crespo, that which changes is not the sculpture itself: instead, we are the ones that change, and the way we “inhabit a body”.

June Crespo's project for CA2M uses the work methods compiled in this text as strategies that suggest different ways for sculpture and bodies to relate to each other. The common denominator of these strategies is the fact that they present the act of seeing and the act of doing as linking practices, as engaged forms of action that are committed to an urge for transformation. These forms are reaffirmed in the conviction that the body cannot be defined based on its value as an undivided unit, but rather that its fragmented condition must be addressed. The abstraction and estrangement of the sculptures' forms, and the analogies made with a range of distinct objects and motifs, are all presented in Crespo's practice as tools that allow for their fluctuating condition to be dealt with. It is an exercise sustained over time, which crystallises in movement and change.

- 1 De Ateliers is a space for artistic residencies, founded in Haarlem in 1963 and currently located in Amsterdam. The residencies have a duration of two years.
- 2 June Crespo in conversation with Marc Navarro: “Forma cerrada pero rota”, *El Estado Mental*, 2016.
- 3 *Chance Album no. 1*, etHALL, Barcelona, 29 September – 12 November 2016.
- 4 Another example of June Crespo's research into tubular structures is the exhibition *Kanala*, curated by Ángel Calvo Ulloa, at MARCO, Vigo, 5 February – 17 April 2016.
- 5 “Cuerpo a través. Conversación entre June Crespo y Susana González”, in *Helmets*, A Coruña, Fundación María José Jove, 2020, p. 82
- 6 The flower used by June Crespo as a model is a *Strelitzia*, commonly known as “bird of paradise” flower. The artist chose this flower for its particular anatomical structure and its stalk, which is robust and slightly curved. When this flower is enlarged, it looks like a kind of channel.
- 7 “The postmodern body, from the vantage-point of these artists and many others, is conceived of uniquely as the ‘body-in-pieces’: the very notion of a unified, unambiguously gendered subject is rendered suspect by their work.” Linda Nochlin: *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1994, p. 55.
- 8 “Scientific and biotechnological developments accomplish a progressive fragmentation of bodily integrity and a dematerialization of corporeal matter. Whether for the sake of biogenetic exploitation, or for that of scientific experimentation, we have entered the era of ‘organs without bodies’.” (Rosi Braidotti: *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.)
- 9 “Cuerpo a través. Conversación entre June Crespo y Susana González”, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
- 10 Okwui Enwezor: Prologue to Patrizia Dander, Julienne Lorz (eds.): *Skulpturales Handeln/Sculptural Acts*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012, p. 10.
- 11 June Crespo, in conversation with the present author.
- 12 “Sculpture as image has a great historical trajectory, and I would include Bernini in that lineage. But sculpture as a language – sculptural language – is, for me, both ancient (as in Paleolithic) and more recent. Is Picasso's *Glass of Absinthe* a declaration of sculpture as a language, the first of its kind in the 20th century? It is always imaged as a portrait – frontal, ‘best’ view – but, in reality, it is not only a very small object, it is also unforgiving in refusing to offer a single, optimal view.” (“Phyllida Barlow and Vincent Fecteau”, *BOMB Magazine*, no. 126, Summer 2016.)
- 13 “Part of the eroticism of this medium is its incompleteness.” (Laura U. Marks: *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 11.)
- 14 “Modern architects of the 1920s and 1930s eliminated things like mouldings and sculptural treatment from the surfaces of their walls in order to keep dust and other detritus from sticking. In other words, they mobilised a certain notion of hygiene in order to cleanse architecture from its contact with the plastic arts.” Sylvia Lavin: “Plasticity at Work”, *Flash in the Pan*. London: Architectural Association, 2014, p. 40.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 16 Susan Krane: *Lynda Benglis: Dual Natures*. Atlanta: The High Museum of Art, 1990.
- 17 Lucy R. Lippard: *Eva Hesse*. Mexico City: Alias, 2017.
- 18 Briony Fer: “Treading Blindly, or the Excessive Presence of the Object”, *Art History*, Vol. 20, June 1997, p. 276.
- 19 June Crespo, text included in the leaflet for the exhibition *entre alguien y algo*, held at the gallery CarrerasMugica, Bilbao, 27 May – 29 July 2022.
- 20 “You may laugh at a hat, but what you are making fun of, in this case, is not the piece of felt or straw, but the shape that men have given it, the human caprice whose mould it has assumed.” Henri Bergson: *Laughter: An Essay on The Meaning of the Comic*. New York: Macmillan, 1914, p. 3.
- 21 Birgit Pelzer: “Axiomatics Subject to Withdrawal”, in Lisa Lee (ed.): *Isa Genzken*. October Files 17. Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 2015.
- 22 Giorgio Agamben: *Desnudez*. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2011, p. 94.
- 23 Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *The World of Perception*. London/New York: Routledge, 2004, p.111.
- 24 “Julia Spínola en conversación con Marc Navarro”, in Marc Navarro (ed.): *Gira tot gira*. Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 2021, p. 47.
- 25 Elena Aitzkoa, Julia Spínola, Lucía C. Pino: “Tres escultoras conversan”, *El Estado Mental*, 2016 (<https://elestadomental.com/especiales/el-mes-del-arte/tres-escultoras-conversan>).
- 26 June Crespo, *entre alguien y algo*. CarrerasMugica, Bilbao, 2022, *loc. cit.*
- 27 June Crespo, *Acts of Pulse*, P420, Bologna, 2021.
- 28 June Crespo, unpublished notes on two videos by Miriam Cahn: *Das wilde Lieben* (1984) and *Lesen im Staub* (“Reading in the Dust”, 1988), 2013.
- 29 “Conversación entre Julia Spínola, David Bestué y June Crespo”, in *June Crespo. Helmets*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Artium, Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, 2020, p.19.
- 30 “Monument derives, like monster, from monere, to remind, and back to men, memory, thought.” Terry Kirk: “Monumental Monstrosity, Monstrous Monumentally”, *Perspecta*, 2008, Vol. 40, 2008, Monster, pp. 6–15.
- 31 June Crespo in conversation with Marc Navarro: “Forma cerrada pero rota”, *loc. cit.*



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