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Juan Muñoz. Stories of Art: an extensive temporary exhibition plus works displayed in the galleries of the permanent collection

The Museo del Prado is presenting a dialogue between the master of contemporary sculpture and the art of the past that inspired him

Juan Muñoz (1953–2001), one of Spain’s most influential contemporary artists, “returns” to the Museo del Prado, a place of inspiration that he frequently visited. Muñoz’s work reveals an ongoing conceptual relationship with Renaissance and Baroque painting with regard to the way in which he approached perspective, composition and staging.

Curated by Vicente Todolí, former director of Tate Modern (2003-2010), *Juan Muñoz. Stories of Art* brings together installations, figures, books from the artist’s library, artifacts in the form of display cases filled with objects, canvases, drawings and prints. It will be presented in Rooms C and D of the Jerónimos building and several rooms in the Villanueva building until 8 March 2026. The works on display reveal the profound connection between the artist and the great masters represented in the Prado, such as Velázquez and Goya, as well as with the traditions of the Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque. In addition, further works by the artist have been allowed to leave the temporary exhibition galleries in order to be displayed more dynamically in rooms of the Permanent Collection (Room 12/Velázquez and Room 28/Rubens), in specific locations such as the South Staircase near the Murillo entrance, and in the exterior area in front of the Goya entrance. The exhibition is presented in collaboration with the City Council of Madrid.

Featuring emblematic works by Muñoz, such as *The Prompter*, *Conversation Piece* and *The Nature of Visual*

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Illusion, the exhibition offers an experience in which visitors encounter silent figures that seem to observe us from a universe suspended between illusion and reality.

Museo Nacional del Prado, 17 November 2025

The exhibition *Juan Muñoz. Stories of Art* presents a journey through the work of one of the most unique sculptors in contemporary art; an artist whose practice was marked by illusionism, theatricality and architecture as a space of fiction. Influenced by Borromini, Bernini, Velázquez and Goya, Muñoz created settings in which the viewer becomes an actor, witness and protagonist of scenes charged with psychological tension and mystery.

Born in Madrid in 1953, where he always had his studio, Juan Muñoz is inseparable from his native city and within it from the Museo del Prado, which he visited throughout his life and which was a constant source of inspiration. This exhibition reveals the connection between a contemporary artist and the history of art, which Muñoz studied with passionate interest and in a transversal manner from a young age. His visits to the Prado made him a fervent admirer of the great masters, whose lessons he irreverently combined, stating: "I can take from previous artists whatever I want and whatever I need... I have no problem admitting that the *Dama de Baza* is as important to my work as a neon tube: I steal everything I can from the history of art."

A sculptor conceptually nourished by painting, Muñoz acknowledged his intention to incorporate its illusionistic elements into his work. From the Renaissance artists he adopted one of their principal concerns: how to position the viewer in relation to the work as a whole, "in relation to the moment of creation, of wonder." Particularly inspired by Mannerism and the Baroque, he experimented with the distortion of forms, the manipulation of space, and the tension between viewer and object. From Borromini and Bernini he learned to conceive of architecture as a theatrical framework, capable of provoking both belief and disorientation: "I think the great Baroque artists were asked to do the same as modern artists: to construct a fictional place. To make the world larger than it is."

Enigmatic, life-size figures appear throughout his work, positioned in relation to one another in intimate settings or wandering about in groups. The viewer encounters them frozen in mysterious actions or with their mouths slightly open, as if struck dumb mid-sentence. Muñoz's avatars evoke classical Greek sculpture while simultaneously engaging in a dialogue with Borges and Beckett's absurdist and existentialist texts.

In the mid-1980s Muñoz began to include optical floors in his installations which are reminiscent of Borromini's but also of Minimalist structures in the manner of Carl Andre, designed to be walked across. He continued to use architecture as an integral part of his work, creating dramatic environments that envelop the viewer.

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Works such as *The Prompter* and *The Nature of Visual Illusion* allude to the theatrical devices of the Baroque period, turning the visitor into both actor and witness.

Another recurring motif in Muñoz's work is the balcony, evoking those depicted by both Manet and Goya, as well as the wrought-iron ones typical of Madrid. For the artist, the balcony was "a metaphor for looking at that which looks at you", a setting for mutual observation.

Influenced by Giacometti, the *Conversation Pieces* which Muñoz created throughout his career were conceived in a non-naturalistic manner, stripped of recognisable associations in order to construct compositions of intense psychological charge. Initiated in 1991, these groups of figures with identical faces and individual gestures seem to converse with each other and invite the viewer to become part of the scene, but ultimately reject our entry and oblige us to experience our own presence in the space.

Echoes of Velázquez and Goya resonate throughout Muñoz's work, from the mirrors that involve the viewer - as in *Five Seated Figures*, evoking *Las Meninas* - to the scenes of silent absurdity reminiscent of Goya's *Los Caprichos* and *The Disasters of War*, dramatising that fine line between laughter and suffering that so fascinated Muñoz and which he learned from that artist.

Despite his profound commitment to art history, Juan Muñoz was an innovator who transcended the aesthetics of his time. A creator of sculptures, installations, drawings, writings and sound works, he considered himself a storyteller whose narratives ask us to suspend our disbelief and enter into his Baroque illusionism.

Download information and images:

<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/museum/professional-access>

Juan Muñoz. Stories of Art

Born in Madrid, where he always had his studio, Juan Muñoz (1953–2001) is inseparable from his city and within it from the Museo del Prado, which he visited throughout his life and which was a constant source of inspiration. This exhibition reveals the connection between a contemporary artist and the history of art, which Muñoz studied with passion and without any established order from a very young age. His constant visits to the Prado made him an admirer of the great masters, whose lessons he irreverently combined, declaring: "I can take from previous artists whatever I want and whatever I need... I have no problem acknowledging that the *Dama de Baza* is as important to my work as a neon tube: I steal everything I can from the history of art."

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Conceptually, Muñoz's sculpture was enriched by painting, and he admitted his intention that his work preserve its illusionistic elements. From the Renaissance artists he adopted one of their principal concerns: how to position the viewer in relation to the totality of the work, "in relation to the moment of creation of wonder." Particularly inspired by Mannerism and the Baroque, Muñoz's work is based on experimentation with the forms and volumes of figures, unusual spatial relationships, and the sensation of tension. Attracted by Bernini and Borromini, he employed architecture as a resource capable of offering a theatrical frame of reference: "I think the great Baroque artists were asked to do the same thing as modern artists: to construct a fictitious place. To make the world larger than it is." Despite this profound engagement with art history, Muñoz was a great innovator who transcended the aesthetic of his time. The echoes of the masters he most admired, especially Velázquez and Goya, resound throughout his entire body of work. For the artist, the present must necessarily relate to the past; new art must teach us something about its tradition. Creator of sculptures, installations, drawings, writings and sound works, Muñoz considered himself a storyteller, a narrator whose tales were told through works filled with silent suggestions, in which he made full play of perplexity while invoking the entire history of art.

Exhibits List on Display

ROOM C

1. *Many Drums*

Metal screen, drums, plaster, paint, and plasterboard
200 × 300 × 50 cm
Private collection

Drums appear in numerous works by Muñoz. In its mute state, the drum evokes sound that is not heard but imagined. In the manner of a warning not to trust what the sense of sight conveys to us, the image of the work changes as we move. The artist made a series of photographs of himself with a drum, which he associated with certain stories surrounding this instrument, linked to the life of Luis Buñuel and the famous *tamborradas* of Calanda, as well as to Oskar, the protagonist of Günter Grass's novel *The Tin Drum*, who, having precociously perceived the falseness of the world, decides never to grow up, making the drum – the symbol of that transformation – his most cherished possession.

2. *Ventriloquist Looking at a Double Interior*

1988–2000

Resin, silicone, motor, wood, oilstick and chalk on fabric mounted on board

Muñoz employed the figure of the ventriloquist's dummy in various works. In *Ventriloquist Looking at a Double Interior* the dummy appears to assume the role of

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observer, and at the same time, by turning its back to us, encourages us to believe in what it is looking at: we become spectators twice over. The double interior that is the subject of the gaze seems to represent a single space seen from two opposing viewpoints which, when looked at carefully, we realise are furthermore impossible. It is usually a composition that shows everyday interior spaces, and in this case it powerfully recalls that of *Las Meninas*, especially because of its pronounced perspectival-box quality, the deep spatial recession created by the opening at the back, and the use of a line of light on the floor to define the space.

3. *The Prompter*

1988

Papier-mâché, bronze, linoleum, wood and metal

One of Muñoz's most emblematic works, *The Prompter* locates us before a typically theatrical device, a mechanism intended to assist the actor who should be on stage, possibly playing the drum. It is the prompter who corrects lapses of memory and ensures the continuity of the discourse, if indeed there is one. The work, permeated by a certain Beckettian sense of the absurd, ensnares the viewer in a moment of time suspended by the presence of the prompter and the absence of the actor, leaving us in a place that cannot be identified as prior to or following the action. This installation, one of the first in which Muñoz included an optical floor, reflects the key role of theatrical devices and visual fiction in his work. "When I made *The Prompter* I wanted to create a house of memory, the mind that is never seen but is always there. It is somewhat like the theatre of Giulio Romano or Giordano Bruno, like a stage without performance, without a play, only a man trying to remember, trying not to forget."

Londres, Tate. Presented by the artist's Estate, 2008

4. *Staring at the Sea I*

1997–2000

Polyester resin, cardboard, mirror and plastic

Private collection

After nearly a century of the hegemony of abstraction, Muñoz was one of the forerunners of the reintroduction of the human figure into contemporary art, the realistic representation of bodies from unusual viewpoints and filled with double meanings. In this work, two figures standing on tiptoe and leaning forward with their faces covered with masks, gaze toward a nonexistent horizon that they nonetheless seem to imagine: the horizon is the figures themselves reflected in the mirror, once again recalling Velázquez, and introducing the notion of the complexity involved in the discovery of any form of identity. At the same time, the ideas of play, a certain alienation, and above all estrangement – so characteristic of Juan Muñoz's poetics – become particularly evident in this piece.

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“I am interested in the way we look..., observing the observer, or observing myself observing.”

5. *Untitled (Balconies and Optical Floor)*

1992

Iron, cloth and linoleum

Valencia, IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat, Donación del artista en 1992

In one of his works most clearly linked to Baroque architecture, with elements that recall Bernini's Cornaro chapel in Rome, Muñoz configures a visually complex space articulated between the optical floor and the figures gathered on the two balconies that preside over the centre of the room. The symbolic recreation of these two groups of rag figures locates us in a theatrical context and in the ambiguous situation of being simultaneously observers and observed. The motif of balconies first emerged at the start of Muñoz's career: “[In my work] the beginning of everything seems to be the metaphor of the balcony. I believe it is already implicit in that image, the condition of looking at what looks back at you.”

6. *The Nature of Visual Illusion*

1994–97

Polyester resin and acrylic on canvas

Juan Muñoz Estate Collection

The Nature of Visual Illusion is a group of figures with Asian features standing before a curtain that functions as a *trompe l'oeil*. It is, therefore, a work that creates both an illusion and a theatrical setting; a territory where the real world and narrative invention merge, where the viewer becomes sculpture and the sculptures turn into viewers. Theatre and the theatrical, in this sense, become the axis around which the installation is structured, in a manner both self-contained and emblematic. The absence of a privileged viewpoint for this work makes it one of the artist's most open and unpredictable. Through inertia we seek out narratives in the connections between the figures that guide us in a search for meaning, only to discover, in the end, that they contain far more enigma than clarity. Muñoz was always aware of the role of curators and collectors in the definitive presentation of his work. Once again here he allows the person responsible for installing the work to follow their intuition, thus “delegating” the decisions regarding its final configuration, which changes with each exhibition, always adapting to the architectural context.

“I have always used grand theatrical resources to capture the viewer's attention, to induce you to look, and thus be able to follow your gaze afterward and focus it on what interests me.”

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7. *Die Winterreise*

[The Winter Journey]

1994

Polyester resin, silicone, wooden floor, steel and motor

Nîmes, Carré d'Art, Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes. Achat de l'Etat en 1994, attribution à la Ville de Nîmes en 2008

A recurring image in Muñoz's work is that of a figure mounted on the back of another. There are two clear sources for this image: firstly, Francisco de Goya's engravings *Tú que no puedes* [You who cannot] and *Devota Profesión* [Devout Profession] from the series *Los Caprichos*. The second source is the sculpture *Aeneas, Anchises and Ascanius* (1619) by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, housed in the Galleria Borghese in Rome, a city where Muñoz lived and worked in 1993. This sculptural group represents the flight of Aeneas with his father and son during the capture of Troy by the Mycenaean forces, an episode narrated by Virgil in the *Aeneid*. The subject is also represented in the Museo del Prado in the painting *Aeneas Fleeing with his Family* (c. 1700) by Luca Giordano. Muñoz completes the historical references in his work by entitling it *Winterreise* [Winter Journey], in reference to one of Franz Schubert's last compositions, which narrates the symbolic journey of a heartbroken man through a desolate winter landscape.

Concerning his sculptures, Juan Muñoz said: "On the one hand there is the stillness of a figurative sculpture that for me remains an inexplicable enigma. On the other hand, the representation of movement and gesture within stillness is a challenge that is endlessly fascinating (...) I think between stillness and movement, I try to find a place for my figures."

8. *Conversation Piece*

2001

Bronze and steel cable

Private Collection

Within the history of Western art, the sub-genre known as the "conversation piece" refers to a type of group portrait that emphasises the relationship between the figures. Juan Muñoz alludes to these compositions in a group of works of the same title in which he masterfully resolved one of the issues of modern sculpture that most interested him: the activation of the space around the works. *Conversation Piece* is conceived so that its installation is always different and can thus be most successfully adapted to the space, in order for visitors to move between the figures and thus become part of the scene.

"My characters sometimes behave like a mirror that cannot reflect. They are there to tell you something about your gaze, but they cannot because they do not allow you to see yourself."

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9. *George with Parallel Lines*

1989

Resin, steel, wood and linoleum

Madrid, private collection

Frequently encountered in courtly contexts, people with restricted growth combined their diversity with certain privileges not granted to others, as such occupying prominent positions in a number of paintings in this museum, particularly in the work of Velázquez. With regard to this subject, Muñoz stated: “I used the figure of George because for me it was the image of that idea of otherness... The way you relate to someone like that when you pass them on the street is equally fascinating... It’s that feeling that they are different from you, for strictly biological reasons, but somehow there is a strangeness and a distance between you and them that creates discomfort in the person looking, and that’s what interested me. You can never say ‘this person makes me feel uncomfortable’; it’s not true. He provokes the discomfort you have with yourself. It’s that arrival, that sudden awareness of yourself, that becomes problematic.”

10. *Broken Noses Carrying a Bottle no. 2*

1999

Polyester resin, plastic and paper

Vitoria-Gasteiz, Artium Museoa. Colección Museo de Arte Contemporáneo del País Vasco

11. *Standing Figure*

1999. Bronze with yellow patina

Mexico, courtesy of the Fundación Calosa

12. *Untitled*

2000

Pigmented polyester resin

Private collection

Figures with Broken Noses

In his work Juan Muñoz explored his interest in the circus and jugglers. The sculptures in the *Broken Noses* series defy gravity in compositions of a Mannerist nature, in which effort is transformed into play. These works reveal how Muñoz’s profound interest in art history extended beyond the masters of the Early Modern age and the initiators of modern art, and that Antiquity also attracted his attention. An Egyptian bust from the 4th century BC known as the *Green Head* in the Ägyptisches Museum in Berlin lends its face to these figures. Muñoz even retains the fragment of the pillar on the back of the head, declining to hide his direct reference. Over the centuries, the faces of sculptures were deliberately attacked during times of political and religious conflict. In Egypt, for example, the noses of statues were cut off as a way to “nullify” the spiritual power of the representation. Nonetheless, some

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of Muñoz's figures use the flat area left by the broken nose to their advantage as a base for their impossible balancing acts. The title of the work has on occasions been related to Auguste Rodin's bust *L'homme au nez cassé* (1865), adding another historical layer to Muñoz's concept and indicating his boldness when combining all the periods of art history that interested him.

13. *Five Seated Figures*

1996

Polyester resin and mirror

Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

One of the works by Muñoz with the clearest reference to the complex construction of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* is this sculptural group, in which the mirror, a symbol in the artist's work of a certain *voyeurism*, competes with the figures for the viewer's attention. At the same time, it closes the perceptual and dramatic circle of an almost domestic space inhabited by the seated figures and into which we – surely unwelcome – spectators burst, catapulted by the mirror towards another space and perhaps even another time. Like the specular image of Philip IV and Mariana of Austria in Velázquez's masterpiece, the viewer's reflection in the mirror activates the direct relationship between our space and that of the work.

“The viewer becomes something very similar to the object being observed, and perhaps the viewer has become that which is being observed.”

Juan Muñoz based this group of works on the historical “cabinets of curiosity”; pieces of furniture or rooms belonging to the European nobility and bourgeoisie in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries in which they collected and displayed a wide range of objects. Veritable encyclopaedias on display, they were the direct predecessors of modern museums. In these works, Muñoz undertook an exercise of ordering or classification of objects and ideas : female figures gazing into mirrors while being looked at by men, erotic fetishes, mouths, corn cobs, phallic elements, personal effects, a wristwatch, and so on. Yet they can also be seen as small-scale projections of future working possibilities. In the manner of a personal museum of his language or portable collection of forms and objects, the cabinets were originally installed representing a mental and physical crossroads.

ROOM D

14. *First Cabinet*

1999

Steel, glass, resin, lead, wood, mirror, tape, ink, plaster and plastic

Private collection

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15. *The Crossroads Cabinet: January*

1999

Steel, glass, resin, lead, wood, mirror, tape, ink, plaster, copper and plastic

Private collection

16. *The Crossroads Cabinet: March*

1999

Steel, glass, resin, lead, wood and tape

Courtesy of the Galería Carreras Múgica y Galería Guillermo de Osma

17. *The Crossroads Cabinet: May*

1999

Steel, glass, resin, wood and mirror

Private collection

18. *The Crossroads Cabinet: July*

1999

Steel, glass, resin, wood and mirror

Private collection

19. *The Crossroads Cabinet: September*

1999

Steel, glass, resin, lead, mirror and plastic

Sotheby's

20. *The Crossroads Cabinet: October*

1999

Steel, glass, resin, lead, wood and mirror

Private collection

21. *The Crossroads Cabinet: December*

1999

Steel, glass, resin, lead, wood and mirror

Private collection

In the *Raincoat Drawings*, a series made on a type of cloth called “gabardine”, Muñoz depicts pieces of furniture arranged in domestic interiors of an extemporaneous aesthetic style, with a certain classicism and old-fashioned elegance. The artist drew in black and white – in this series, white on black – and in shades of ochre due to the fact that a type of colour blindness prevented him from perceiving certain tones. These works present uninhabited domestic scenes in which the furniture seems out place, bordering on the absurd. The prints in the *Mobiliario* series expand this interest in the “theatre of the domestic”, this search for everyday settings stripped of all human presence. In them, the artist explores the medium of printmaking, which he had studied as a young man, admired and enjoyed.

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22. *Raincoat Drawing*

1989

Chalk and oilstick on dyed fabric stretched on board
BPD Art Collection

23. *Raincoat Drawing*

1989

Chalk and oilstick on dyed fabric mounted on stretcher
Private collection

24. *Back Drawing*

[Dibujo de espalda]

1990

Oilstick and chalk on dyed fabric stretched on board
Kunstmuseen Krefeld

25. *Untitled*

1990

Oilstick, chalk and ink on dyed fabric stretched on board
Private collection

26. *Back Drawing*

1990

Oilstick, chalk and ink on dyed fabric stretched on board
Kunstmuseen Krefeld

27. *Back Drawing*

1990

Oilstick, chalk and ink on dyed fabric stretched on board
Marc Van de Velde Lovendegem

28. *Raincoat Drawing*

1989

Chalk and oilstick on dyed fabric stretched on board
London, private collection

29. *Raincoat Drawing*

1992

Chalk and oilstick on dyed fabric stretched on board
Private collection

30. *Raincoat Drawing*

1989

Chalk and oilstick on dyed fabric stretched on board
London, private collection

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31. *Furniture XVI*

1996

Mezzotint, drypoint and watercolour on paper adhered to canvas mounted on stretcher

Private collection

32. *Furniture XV*

1996

Aquatint, mezzotint, drypoint and watercolour on paper adhered to canvas mounted on stretcher

Private collection

33. *Furniture XVII*

1996

Aquatint, drypoint and watercolour on paper adhered to canvas mounted on stretcher

Although he was best known for his sculpture, Muñoz particularly enjoyed drawing. The initial gesture of drawing with a piece of chalk on a blackboard evolved toward the use of oilsticks with which he created the *Back Drawings*, male back nudes seen from behind, inspired by drawings by Ingres. As in the sculptural series entitled *Conversation Pieces*, in which the faces of the figures are identical within each group and it is the bodily gestures that confer individual identity, in this series Muñoz investigates what it is in the body rather than in the facial features that differentiates and individualises. These are anonymous figures, extracted from their context and devoid of attributes that allow their origin or destination to be identified. An almost total abstraction of the individual: different from each other and at the same time faceless.

“Drawing is a pleasure, a solitary and very beautiful task. I always draw. I try to make drawings that are separate entities [...]. I don’t think it’s necessary for sculpture to be an independent object. I think it’s part of a broader discourse. If you examine most of the drawings, you’ll see that they really can’t be separated from the rest of the work.”

Hall between room C and D

This section presents a selection of the numerous books on aesthetics and art history that Juan Muñoz had in his library, with a particular reference to the Renaissance, Mannerism and the Baroque, periods that the artist studied with great interest and whose relationship to his work is explored in this exhibition. The books chosen here are the ones most extensively annotated by the artist, and thus presumably those he read most attentively. Also on display is one of his notebooks and various press clippings with comments.

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Villanueva Building. Room12

34. *Sara with Billiard Table*

1996

Polyester resin, acetate sheets, billiard table, wood, iron, acrylic and light
Private collection

Recurring throughout Juan Muñoz's oeuvre is his fascination with the act of looking at what is looking at you and an awareness of that act of looking. This idea first appeared in his work with the metaphor of a balcony as a place from which to look and be seen and subsequently took on many other forms of expression. It is this which explains Muñoz's profound admiration for *Las Meninas*, a masterly example of the boundaries between the place of representation and that of the viewer. In the installation in this room the figures from Velázquez's masterpiece are possibly observing Sara, whereas she is standing on tiptoes, working in front of a pool table that is not set up for the game, but rather acts as a light box where she looks, fully absorbed, at images of herself.

"The question that *Las Meninas* poses to everyone is always the same: where are you looking? In this world it is very difficult [to exercise] the act of discerning what is really important [...]. I was always interested in the fact that in the act of looking you distort what you are looking at, and you become aware that there is no such thing as anything outside of yourself."

Villanueva Building, Room 2

35. *Conversation Piece III*

2001

Welded bronze

Private collection

In art history, the term "conversation piece" describes a genre of 18th-century painting primarily popularised in England which depicts groups of people in informal attitudes, interacting and conversing with one another. One of the most important examples, *The Garden of Love* by Peter Paul Rubens, is here in the Museo del Prado. Juan Muñoz referred to these compositions in his series of works of the same title. In them he investigated the relationship between the viewer and the figures which are the immediate object of our gaze: they attract and invite us while simultaneously distancing us, rejecting and ignoring us. Condemned to immobility in the compositional space, it is our movement around them that brings them to life. They converse animatedly among themselves without our being able to interpret their messages except in our imagination. If we pay attention, we can see that their faces are identical, but their bodies give them individual identity. Provoking us with their silence and stillness, they address us anonymously. In this gallery of the Museo

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del Prado, the work echoes the paintings that surround it, also featuring groups of figures that interact with the sculptor's choral choreographies.

This work has traditionally been associated with Francisco de Goya's print from the Follies series entitled *People in Sacks*, which presents, in the foreground of a scene set in the darkness of the night, a group of figures interacting, and wearing nothing but sacks that constrict their movements.

Villanueva Building. Murillo stairs

36. *Après Degas (jaune)*

1997

Pigmented polyester resin, motor and steel cable
Ville de Grenoble, Collection du Musée de Grenoble

37. *Figure hanging from One Foot*

1999

Polyester resin, cloth and steel cable
Private collection

Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando (1879), an emblematic work by Edgar Degas now in London, inspired Muñoz to create a series of sculptures of figures – isolated, monochromatic, and of striking visual and spatial impact – imbued with a dramatic silence and a certain sense of agony. These figures hang from the ceiling suspended by a rope that is at times clenched between their teeth, and at other times wound around their feet. Some appear immobile, while others make gentle movements. The ambivalence of these figures, particularly of the one hanging by its feet, may also evoke the more suffering poses and gestures to be seen in Francisco de Goya's series *The Disasters of War*. Degas' composition is constructed from a viewpoint unusual in painting but one that would be popularised decades later by the aesthetic innovations of avant-garde photography, namely the low-angle shot. As in *Miss La La*, Muñoz's sculpture locates the action above our heads and obliges us to make the effort to look upwards, as we would in a monumental interior. As Muñoz himself said, "[in Baroque architecture] the view from below plays an important role. These buildings were constructed to provoke a sensation of centrifugal direction, to create a certain disorientation, even dizziness, when looking from the floor towards the ceiling."

Exterior of the Museum

38. *Thirteen laughing at Each Other*

2001

Bronze and corten steel
Juan Muñoz Estate Collection

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Juan Muñoz was interested in Greek sculptural groups, of which the preeminent example is the *Laocoön*, and in the fact that Mannerist and Baroque artists returned to them in order to endow their works with a new type of theatricality and emotion. Muñoz transferred those ideas to contemporary artistic language, of which this sculpture is a good example, its figures contorting with a dynamism that evokes that of the *figura serpentinata* of the classical world and Mannerism.

Several men are laughing while one seems to push another, who appears to carry on laughing in his unavoidable fall. This fine line that divides laughter from suffering, amusement from pain, was another of Muñoz's artistic concerns, clearly influenced by the master of that dichotomy, Francisco de Goya. Moreover, the work evokes a profound sense of strangeness and unease, akin to that produced by the anonymous crowds in some of Goya's *Follies* and *Black Paintings*.

Aware of the effect produced by his figures, Muñoz clarified that his desire was not to arouse fear or sadness in the viewer, but rather to activate the disturbing aspect of a scene in which the two sensations intermingle. "It's violent... but they don't want to scare you. They're not uncanny to favour your terror; they're among themselves saying something to themselves."