Jan. 10 – Feb. 23, 2013:
Muntadas
About Academia

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Audain Gallery

SFU WOODWARD'S

Artist Talk: Jan. 9, 6pm
Opening: Jan. 9, 7pm

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Events:

About Academia: Panel Discussion
January 11, 7pm
Djavad Mowafaghian
World Art Centre
2nd Floor, Simon Fraser University
Goldcorp Centre for the Arts

A panel discussion with the artist and Vancouver-based academics regarding the themes of *About Academia* and the Vancouver context.

Panelists: Ian Angus, Glen Coulthard, Serge Guilbault, Antoni Muntadas, and Geraldine Pratt

Moderated by: Kirsten McAllister

The Audain Gallery is part of Simon Fraser University Galleries and a vital aspect of the Visual Art program in the School for the Contemporary Arts.

Encouraging conceptual and experimental projects that explore the dialogue between the social and the cultural in contemporary artistic practices, the Audain Gallery's mission is to advance the aesthetic and discursive production and presentation of contemporary art through a responsive program of exhibitions.

About Academia is presented in partnership with the Visual Art area's Audain Visual Artist in Residence Program and is curated by faculty member Sabine Bitter.

The Audain Gallery staff are Melanie O'Brian, SFU Galleries Director, and Brady Cranfield, Gallery Assistant.

For more information, please contact: info@audaingallery.ca.

Muntadas: About Academia
Sabine Bitter

Warning: Perception requires involvement. [1]

There are turning points in our society, usually related to politics, and these are the moments when the division between academia and university becomes obvious. This is when you stand up for academic values versus the apparatus that host you, which usually is related to the power that constitutes and finances this machinery. [2]

About Academia is an investigation into the relation between the university and academia by the Barcelona-born and New York-based artist Antoni Muntadas. Since the 1970s, his practice has addressed the restructuring of systems and institutions through both a social and political framework and a critique of media and other systems of representation. Muntadas does not provide the audience with a formulated critique; rather, he poses a problematic: his work involves us in a set of questions and contradictions, which allows the viewer to take a position for reflection.

Although often perceived within the framework of institutional critique, Muntadas resists this categorization. He also avoids framing his work simply within the notion of artistic research and knowledge production, as if this practice was a new form of artistic engagement. Muntadas instead describes his works as extended projects that begin with curiosity and develop into extensive explorations that are at the same time creative, personal, and systematic.

Muntadas worked on *About Academia* for over three years, and he emphasizes three main topics within the project: privatization, corporatization, and gentrification. Although *About Academia* has previously been located in, and focused on, the university system in the USA, its relevance for the context in Vancouver is crucial today. Especially if we think of the new location and the context of the School for the Contemporary Arts at the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, located in the Woodward's complex on the edge of Vancouver's downtown.

Using the wide-ranging questionnaire that Muntadas devised for MIT and Harvard, *About Academia* offers the possibility to critically articulate specific Vancouver conditions. As part of his residency, Muntadas and the Audain Gallery will develop a publication to contextualize *About Academia* within the unique social, political, and economic context of universities and academia in Canada, British Columbia, and Vancouver. As Muntadas suggests, perception of the exhibition will require involvement.

1. Antoni Muntadas, *On Translation*.
2. Ute Meta Bauer, in *About Academia* (the transcriptions: an internal document): p.127.

ABOUT ACADEMIA

3 screen video installation
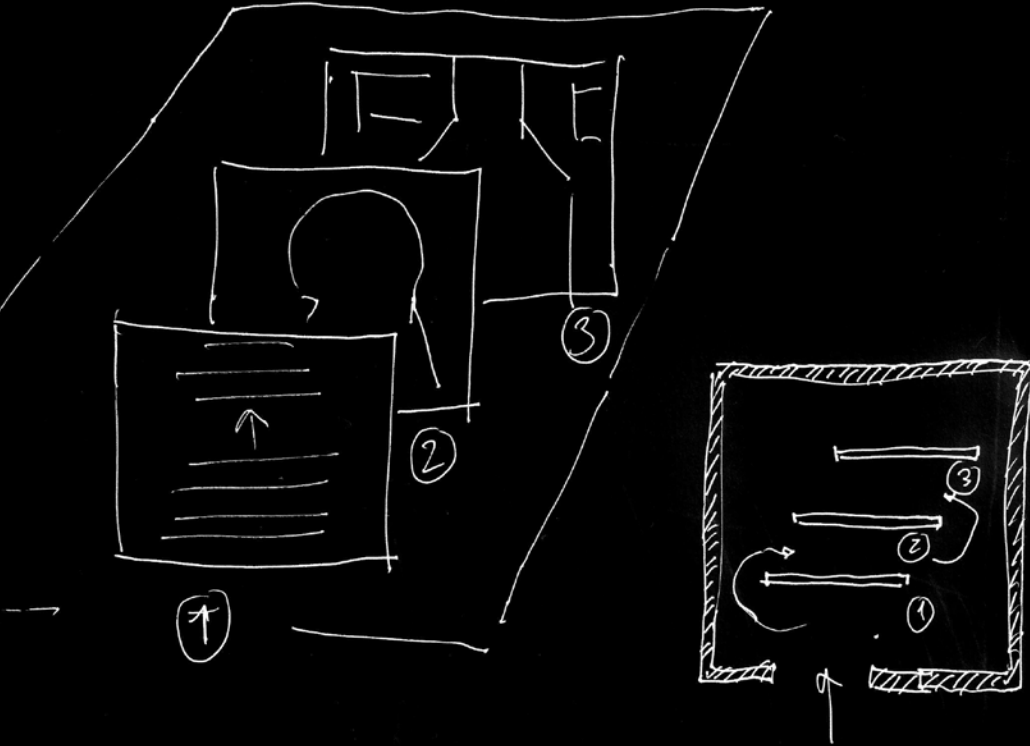
① TEXT ROLLING UP
② TALKING HEADS. + SOUND
③ ARCHITECTURE HARVARD + MIT

An Interview About Academia

Sabine Bitter: What was your initial drive to do this project, to make the university a site to study?

Antoni Muntadas: I've been teaching in Cambridge, at MIT, for several years, at different levels–as a research fellow, a visiting professor, and now a professor in practice. Harvard asked me to do a project for the Carpenter Center. I saw this as a good opportunity to start to think about working here, my experiences here–Cambridge as a school town. That led into my questions about the academic world, particularly from the perspective of the relationship between Harvard and MIT. The project took three years to complete. I had some people helping me do research at first. I treated the interviews as a kind of "field trip" for the project. I started to do them without thinking about how I would use them later.

SB: So you did not choose the interview as a format for the exhibition first? The interviews came out of the process of your research?

AM: Exactly. I feel that we sometimes lose the basic idea of what an interview is. I've been using interviews in my work for a long time. All my projects start with curiosity. In this case, the people I did interviews with at MIT

and Harvard have been teaching there for many years. They have long-term experience, they have their opinions, and they have their academic records. As subjects, they give me a kind of objective way to see my interest in this project: to see how academia disseminates knowledge and also how it exercises power. I held interviews over three years, and I included some people who were not from Cambridge, but from New York. Because I started to think more in terms of the architecture of the university, I started to talk with some people from Columbia, like Mark Wigley.

SB: You talk about academia as a site that produces knowledge, but that also exercises power. Why did you choose to tell the story of academia and the university through the position of teachers and people in powerful positions within the structure of the university, rather than through the position of the people sitting in the classrooms, the students who deal with knowledge in terms of learning?

AM: Every project should have a focus and I wanted to talk with people who had a cumulative experience over different periods, generations, and situations at the universities, and of different moments in politics in the

United States, especially including the Sixties. Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky come to mind–these are people who participated in the Sixties. Howard Zinn had a record of fighting with academia and Chomsky is very politically active. Chomsky represents resistance, especially against war, and I wanted to know how his resistance was inside academia. I wanted to use this project to talk about the power structure in the university. The people I interviewed could represent and talk about how that structure functions and, because they're also reflexive critics, perhaps propose an alternative. Self-criticism–that was the last question I had for them. From the beginning, as a second part to this project, I considered interviewing students–the receivers of this power structure.

SB: With a European background, you have experience with many different places in the world, beyond American universities specifically. I am wondering if you consider this work transferable? For me, *About Academia* asks viewers to talk about the American university system and its global influence in terms of neoliberal politics. Did you consider its reception in those terms?

AM: I have been in the US since 1971. When I made *Between the Frames*, from 1982 to 1993, I looked at the art world system, but in a kind of international way, a global way: the United States, Japan, Latin America, obviously Europe. Every project has its own dynamic. It was very clear to me that this project was to be located in Cambridge, an American University, as a kind of site. Context is a concern of mine. When you asked me to show this work in Vancouver, I said, "Ok – but let's be clear that Canada is a different context." The work isn't talking about Canada; it's not talking about Latin America or Europe; and it's not a model, a copy, or a report. The project is connected with the context where it was made. But I say that from the outside. My main concern is to contextualize the project and you proposed a series of talks and round tables to help do that in Vancouver.

SB: I consider your project to be very relevant outside of the US. From my experience, the American university system is a very powerful force, informing universities and curricula elsewhere. European critics are aware of the Americanization of universities, the implementation of the Bologna Process. In Canada, we can also see this tendency of following the American model.

AM: In Europe, public and private universities are a very different concern.

SB: Yes, that's right. And in Canada we have a system of predominantly public universities. Yet, our public institutions are increasingly being asked to operate like private corporations.

AM: There are three key concerns my project looks at: Privatization on one side, corporations on another, and gentrification on another. Privatization eliminates the responsibility to the public, corporations treat universities as an economic structure, and gentrification is a way to generate money. That pattern is pervasive in American universities.

SB: These things are also crucial topics when we look at the new campus for the School for the Contemporary Arts as part of SFU Woodward's. How was *About Academia* received in the universities?

AM: Like many of my works, this project is an artifact, almost an anthropological artifact to be activated. It represents a certain context and examines issues that are relevant over a certain period of time and in a certain place. It is an instrument to open up discussion, especially in the university context. The places where I've shown the work, besides the Carpenter Center at Harvard, are Arizona State University, the largest public university in America, where there was access to different faculties, departments, and people, and the American Academy in Rome, which is much more selective, with experts

from different disciplines, in a very elitist way. But that's a way of thinking, with a history, which is forced in Italy. But it's clear the work is specific to academia and the university is the place to show it. It belongs to that discussion, activating discourse there. I might consider showing it in other contexts, if they are right.

SB: Universities also constantly ask for ideas, for reflection, and proposals from their faculty, but then the universities don't often seem to

respond back. I think it's interesting that this is an artwork centred on similar questions that faculty are asking in committees and within their papers.

AM: Right. I draw from an artistic perspective, but I understand my practice in an inclusive way. To incorporate the subject of the university in my artistic practice is, for me, not unusual. I could also talk about the system of art or other systems of power.

SB: Your work is based on forms of research. What do you think about the growth of artistic research as a field of study? There are new departments, new chairs, programs, courses, funding, even new universities dedicated to artistic research and knowledge production in the field.

AM: In a way, I welcome all this. It's something I've been thinking about for a long time. As you say, my practice is often seen as research. What I teach in universities is always related to the

things I find interesting and I share my research with students. My critique would be that this development is maybe temporary, something fashionable. We see this with other issues, such as the issue of the archive–a tremendous issue over the last 10 or 15 years. Now I'm afraid that everyone is sick of talking about the archive! What I think is a problem with this development is that it's a certain kind of cultural consumerism. Is it something to build on? One of the classes I teach is on the methodology of a project. I think it's important for people to use a methodology for their work. By that I mean *a* methodology not *the* methodology in a dogmatic way. It's important to have structure while working–I really believe in that.

SB: Another interesting aspect of how you structure your work is its relation to space. I see two ways that space is represented: the way that the universities are shown in the series of shots of school interiors and exteriors and the use of three overlapping panels in the gallery installation. Could you talk about how you structure the panels in the gallery space? And how does your study of the architecture relate to the interviews?

AM: The three screens form a logical relationship. The viewer can discover one screen, then the second, and then the third; they also have the capacity to see the three screens together. The first screen incorporates dictionary definitions and quotations from my research about academia. It offers a description of the university and academia in terms of objective information, like an introduction to the subject, presented like the

credits in a film. This screen is kind of the substratum of the project. The second screen has the interviews, done with a fixed camera, in a kind of "talking head" style, so that it's easier to concentrate on what is said; the soundtrack from the interviews also fills the space. The third screen concerns architecture, mainly the architecture of MIT and Harvard, both insides and outsides. These are the places where the interviews–and all of the issues in the work–are happening. The architectural shots show two main types of universities: an older Oxford or Cambridge type of university, with a British heritage, and a newer university, with contemporary architecture, incorporating the transparency of glass. The architecture is important: the buildings and the spaces have a certain definition. This topology, the construction of these spaces, is a pillar for understanding the issues in the work.

Biography

Born in Barcelona, Spain in 1942, Antoni Muntadas has lived and worked in New York since 1971. His work addresses social, political and communications issues, the relationship between public and private space within social frameworks, and the investigation of channels of information and the ways in which they may be used to censor central information or promulgate ideas. He works in a variety of media, including photography, video, publications, the Internet, and multi-media installations.

His works have been exhibited throughout the world, including the Venice Biennial, Documenta Vl and X in Kassel, the Sao Paulo Biennial, the Whitney Biennial, the Lyon Biennial, the Havana Biennial, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Berkeley Art Museum in California, the Wexner Arts Center in Columbus, Ohio, le Musee d'Art Contemporain de Montreal, le Capc de Bordeaux, France, the Museu de Arte Moderna de Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, the Ludwig Museum in Budapest, Hungary, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, Spain.

He studied at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenieros Industriales in Barcelona and the Pratt Graphic Center in New York. He has taught and directed seminars at the University of California in San Diego, the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Bordeaux and Grenoble, the CAVS at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the San Francisco Art Institute, the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris, the University of São Paulo in Brazil, Cooper Union in New York, and many other institutions.

Muntadas has received several prizes and grants, including those of the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, Arts Electronica in Linz/Austria, Laser d'Or in Locarno, Switzerland, and the Premi Nacional d'Arts Plastiques de la Generalitat de Catalunya. He created works commissioned by the Centre Nacionale des Arts Plastiques in Paris, the Fonds d'Arts Publiques in Marseille, the Public Art Fund in New York, InSite 2005 in San Diego-Tijuana, and Istanbul 2010, and has been resident artist and consulting advisor in several research and education centers, including the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, the Banff Center in Canada, Arteleku in San Sebastian, Spain, and the University of Western Sydney in Australia.

Muntadas is currently Professor of the Practice at ACT/Department of Architecture at MIT and visiting professor at the IUAV in Venice, Italy.