

PROJECT 22

Santiago Sierra

2010

7 forms measuring 600 x 60 x 60cm constructed to be held horizontal to a wall
20 – 28 November 2010
Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane

BIOGRAPHY

Santiago Sierra's sculptures, performances and actions draw on the vocabulary of minimalism and land art to address social and political issues within the contemporary world. Exploring the boundaries of labour and exploitation, Sierra often uses human participants in his events and sculptural configurations. Paid for their subjugation, Sierra reveals the shades of inequity and desperation within different social environments and communities.

FACTS

- *7 forms...* lasted for 9 days from 9am–5pm on weekends and from 10am–5pm on weekdays.
- The work featured seven black coffin-like forms supported on the shoulders of paid workers throughout the exhibition period.
- Teams of workers were required to participate and a total of 28 workers were involved each day, all recruited through Empire Careers in Brisbane.
- Sierra stipulated that they must be paid the minimum wage and be genuinely in need of work.
- *7 forms...* questioned the conditions governing the production of art and the role played by galleries and other art institutions.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project 22, titled *7 forms measuring 600 x 60 x 60 cm constructed to be held horizontal to a wall*, created a new variation of Santiago Sierra's most poetic and elemental work, unifying sculpture and performance to create a physical portrait of the labour economy. Hired for the minimum wage, the employees hold monolithic structures on their shoulders for the duration of a working day. They recall the caryatid or atlas figures whose sculpted forms stand as pillars to support the weight of classical architecture. Carrying casket-like forms on their shoulders, they represent what Sierra calls the 'social burial' of labour.

Sierra's sculptures, performances and actions extend the vocabulary of minimalism to address contemporary social and political issues. His earliest works from the 1990s projected structures out from the gallery wall to create 3-dimensional 'containers' in an attempt to reflect the mercantile qualities of art – as objects for sale or trade. Positioned alone or placed in configurations, vast industrial-looking structures dwarfed the visitor, achieving a corporeal impression of the power and dominance of industry and commerce.

In developing his artworks with a team of labourers, Sierra began incorporating workers as performers and participants. Drawing on the art-historical tradition of using paid models, often taken from the streets, Sierra commissioned his models from the unwanted and ostracised – street workers, illegal immigrants, the unemployed and dispossessed. Conducted within set parameters, like minimalist investigations of form, Sierra's events test individual and social boundaries to expose social and cultural inequalities. In 1999, Sierra permanently tattooed six unemployed young men in Havana, Cuba, for the sum of 30 US dollars each. For the Venice Biennale in 2001, he paid 133 illegal street vendors, immigrants from China, Senegal and Bangladesh, to dye their hair blonde and, in 2009, he investigated sexual variations using different couplings of race and gender in his work *Los Penetrados*.

For Project 22, seven black coffin-like forms were supported upon the shoulders of paid workers throughout the exhibition period. Teams of workers were required to participate and a total of 28 workers were involved each day. Sierra stipulated that they must be paid the minimum wage and be genuinely in need of work. Positioned in the gallery space, side-by-side, the seven forms, and fourteen workers who hold them, created a serial, repetitive appearance, dividing the gallery into 'those who work and those who watch'.

Kaldor Public Art
Project 22: Santiago
Serra, 7 forms
measuring 600 x 60
x 60cm constructed
to be held horizontal
to a wall, Gallery of
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Photo: Natasha
Harth



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