

## FRANCESC TORRES

**Opening: Saturday, April 10th 2010**  
**April - May 2010**

Francesc Torres's sculptural installation *Lluvia uniforme o más de una gota de agua* ["Uniform Rain or More Than Just a Drop of Water"] has a revealing history. It was conceived (but not executed) in 1968 as a proposal for a work of new media art – video at the time belonging to the 'new' -- when the 20-year-old Torres was living in Paris and working as an assistant to the technologically inclined sculptor Piotr Kowalski. It was first tested in 1973 in a scrappy trial-run in a school basement Chicago, soon after Torres's arrival in the U.S. It was first fully executed in 1996 in Valencia at Torres's mid-career survey at IVAM. And now, more than 40 years after its conception, the work returns to form the centerpiece of Torres's fourth solo show at the Elba Benítez Gallery, marking a highlight of the gallery's year-long 20th anniversary celebrations.

*Lluvia uniforme* consists of an intravenous drip-transfusion system of the type intended for medical functions but connected here not to a hospitalized patient's arm but rather, via a video-camera in close-up mode, to a set of video-monitors. The drip-system of *Lluvia uniforme* circulates water, and each droplet – its falling, the sound it makes, the ripples it releases -- is re-transmitted in real time to the monitors in the exhibition space. Each individual drop of water thus multiplies technologically into a small shower of rain – or rather into a controlled representation and re-statement of a shower of rain, a 'uniform' rain, devoid of the aleatory flux of real rain itself.

Water is rephrased as light, nature as artifice, chaos as order – the process is fundamentally metaphoric, and in this *Lluvia uniforme* reveals its debt to the Catalan tradition of visual poetry and to the work of Torres's first mentor, Joan Brossa ("We all owe something to Brossa," as Torres has said of the generation of Catalan artists to which he belongs.) Moreover, beyond the potential beauty and delicacy of the visually poetic metaphor, this same operative principle – a restatement and re-signification from one system to another – functions as a reflection on the deep-rooted linguistic process that forcibly fixes the 'real' volatility of meaning into the uniformity of language, and perhaps of art itself. These layers of reflectivity are all deftly layered within *Lluvia uniforme*; and ultimately, via its curious history, *Lluvia uniforme* acquires yet another layer of metaphor, entirely apt for a work that revolves around water -- that of persistence.

The persistence of *Lluvia Uniforme* through its variegated stages and states over four decades (and counting) metaphorically parallels the hydraulic system to which every real drop of water anywhere belongs. As a result, the metaphor at the very center of *Lluvia uniforme*, via the accretion of time, is redoubled into an "accumulation of complicities," as Torres himself has written about the work in "Conceptual Art, the Tale of the Milkmaid, and the Spectre of the Third International." Furthermore, in this same text Torres continues to develop the driving metaphor of *Lluvia uniforme* by linking the persistence of the visually poetic work to the persistence of his life-long political ideals.

Water, as we all know, is neither created nor destroyed, but instead persists and indeed epitomizes persistence. *Lluvia uniforme* was conceived in 1968 by a young, idealistic and politically engaged artist, and in Paris, no less – in other words, a time and place characterized by the force and rush of youthful, politically engaged ideals. Few would disagree that in this regard 2010 is a far cry from 1968. But fleeting youthfulness aside, all those ideals, whether political, ethical, artistic – where are they now? Do they persist, and persist as such? When they disappear from sight, are they extinguished, or merely changing state in order to continue circulating, like water in the hydraulic system? Or are they, unlike water, created and destroyed? And if created and destroyed, might some Hegelian climax possible, a climax that might break the unrelenting dialectic cycle, that might obviate the need and function of such ideals? Or is even the consideration of such a climax merely yet another 'ideal'?

These questions belong fully to the present, to our own era: in other words, "a lot of water has passed under the bridge" since 1968, as Torres commented in reference to *Lluvia uniforme*. Yet the very fact that *Lluvia uniforme* can continue to raise such questions is a sign of how remarkably fresh the work remains today. The rain continues: the river of history flows on and on.

**George Stolz**

A pioneer of installation art in the 1970's Francesc Torres (Barcelona, 1948) has been a key contributor to international art for the last four decades. Torres's work has ranged from his early, conceptually-structured and poetically-oriented sculptural installations to his more recent extensive multi-media projects that explore themes of memory, power, politics and history. Torres has exhibited widely, including major solo exhibitions in the Whitney Museum of Modern Art, the Carnegie Institute, the International Center for Photography, the Stedilijk Museum, the Reina Sofía and Macba, and his work forms part of numerous private and public collections around the world. Torres currently resides between Barcelona and New York.