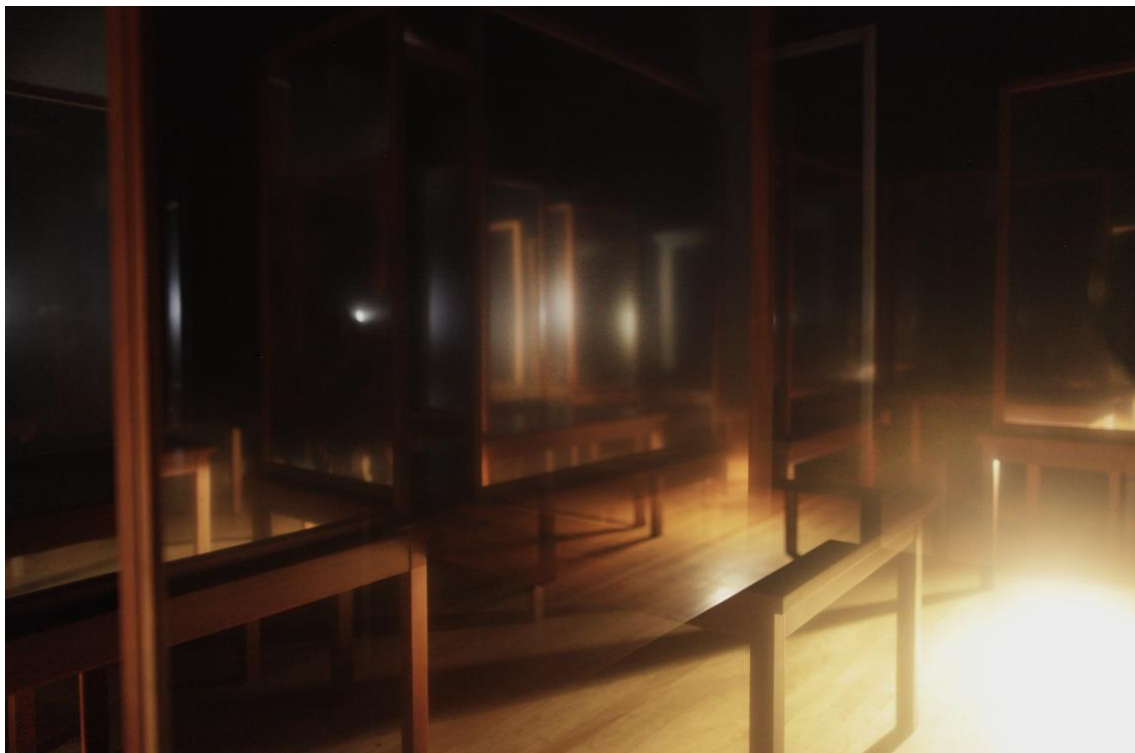


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The space in between, 2012

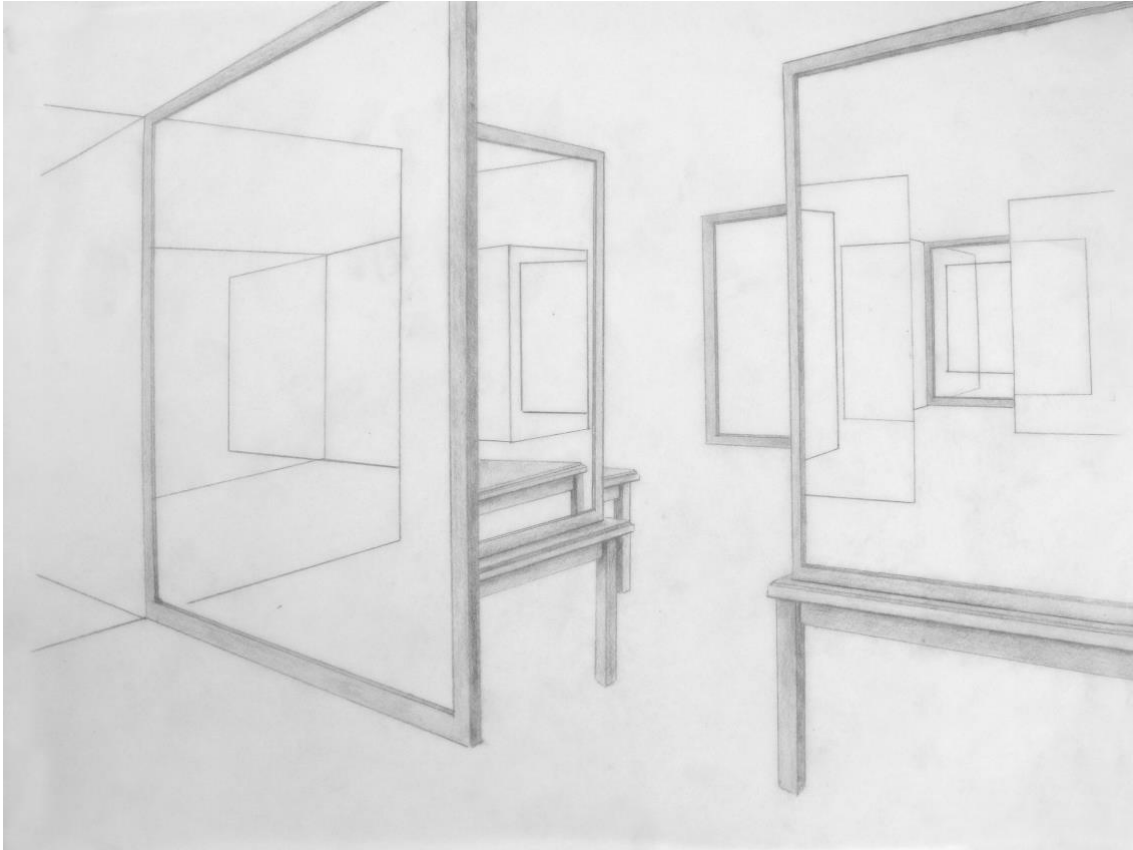
## FABIOLA TORRES-ALZAGA

# ASSEMBLING SPACES

Daniel Garza Usabiaga\*

For over a decade, Fabiola Torres-Alzaga's artistic production has explored subjects related to magic, filmmaking and all its special effects, and catoptrics, the phenomena of reflected light with the aim of investigating the relationship between illusion and reality. One element that has appeared constantly in her work is the mirror. Torres-Alzaga's pieces and projects revive the dual purpose given to reflective surfaces during the Baroque era, a time when mirrors were used both as scientific objects for studying angles and the laws of reflection and as gadgets for creating wonder. In her work, perceptive incongruity and the consequent sense of wonder are maintained using mirrors, creating reflections whose causal explanations are complex enough to destabilize the habits and conditions of perception. But beyond any illusions

to magic, optics, and filmmaking, her production reveals a clear knowledge of, interest in, and constant reflection on the legacies of modern art, primarily related at the creation of sculptures and objects. This type of work is in line with much of the artist's production over the past ten years: three-dimensional pieces that influence the spatial scene, while also transforming the spectator's experience--two defining conditions of modern sculpture.



THE SPACE BETWEEN (SKETCH), 2012

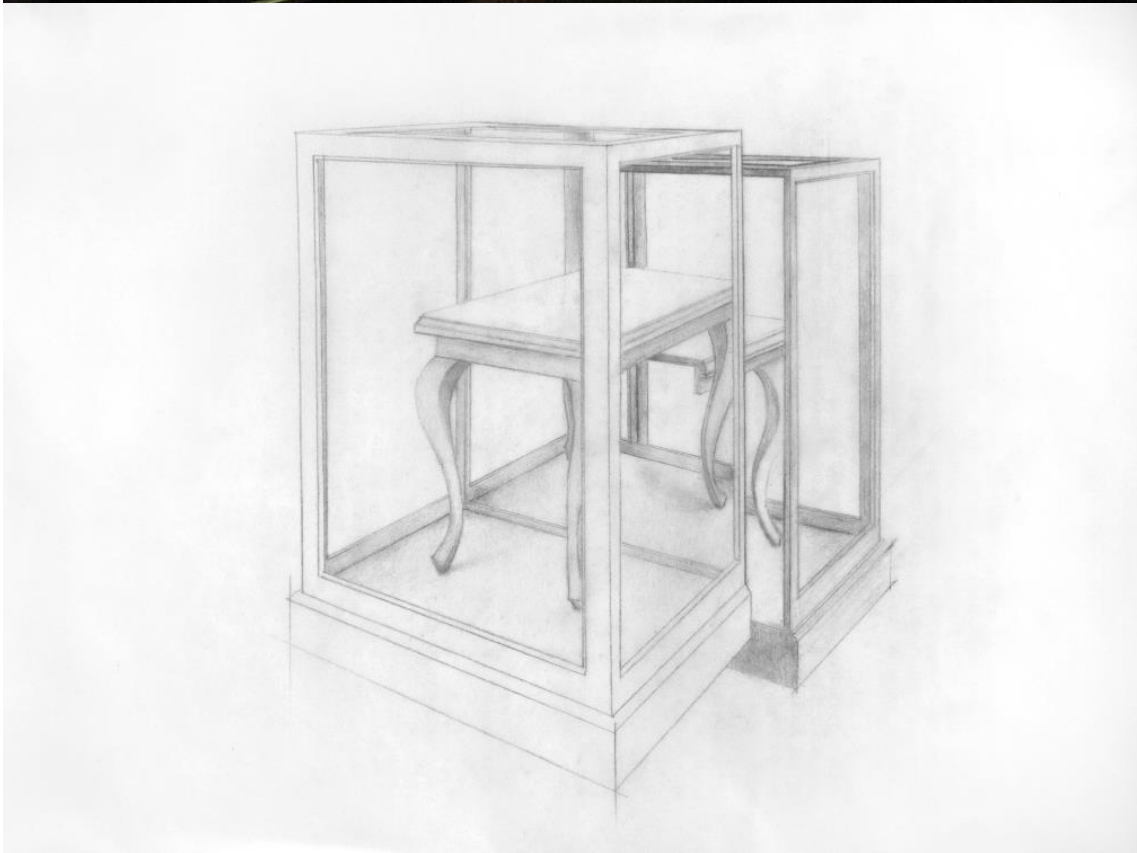
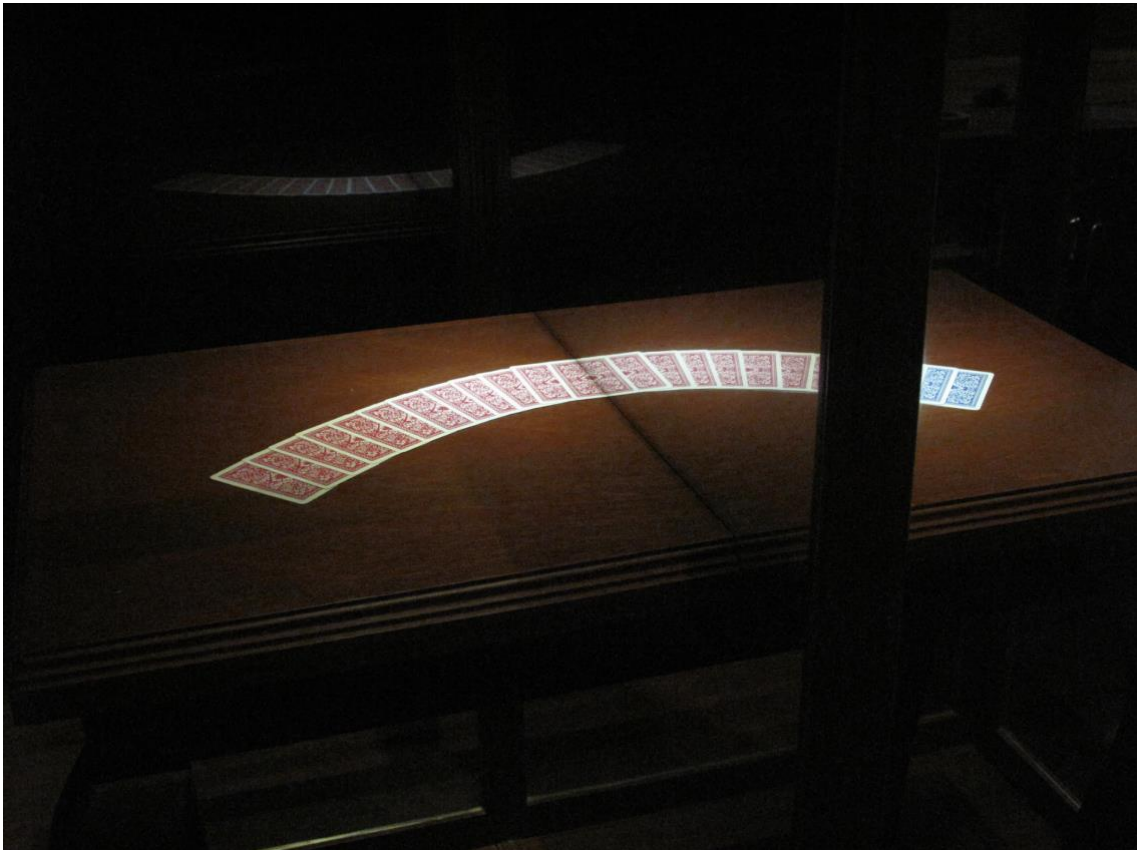
The series untitled *Porta-infinites [infinity Cases]* (2004) is a group of objects that look like briefcases, but transform into optical devices. An *infinity case* shows the spectator not only what is ahead, but also the reflection of what is behind and on either side of him or her. The panoramas presented by these objects are ambiguous and tend to multiply and confuse space. They also reveal Torres-Alzaga's interest in the work of Lygia Clark, evident not only in the fact that both artists' pieces are transformable --an essential characteristic of the Brazilian artist's sculptural production-- but also in how the three-dimensional object somehow becomes circumstantial in order to promote a new sensorial experience. This is seen in Clark's series of works known as *Nostalgia do corpo* [Nostalgia of the Body] (1971), made up of devices and tools that articulate new sensorial relationships in the spectator. Some of these, such as *Máscaras Sensoriais* [Sensorial Masks] (1968), use mirrors and reflection to transform spatial experiences, alter perceptions, and thus carry out a complex exploration of the domain of the tactile. The *infinity case* produces a similar experience: the sculptural object seems to disappear, resulting in a new way of

perceiving space with the "kineticism of the body" at its core, to borrow the phrase Guy Brett used when writing about the originality of Clark's work.<sup>1</sup>

Many of Torres-Alzaga's three-dimensional works utilize wooden showcases reminiscent of baroque cabinets of curiosities, which would be filled with objects to spark spectator's interest and sense of wonder. The artist's boxes or containers may be linked to the work of Joseph Cornell, a connection that may be easily established with pieces such as *Ocho gestos hacia el escondite* [Eight Gestures toward the Hiding Place] (2013), but also with her showcases and small glass boxes held up by slender wooden legs. It is noteworthy that rather than using everyday objects as Cornell does with his boxes, Torres-Alzaga's work is distinguished by the use of mirrors to create scenes contained in a showcase: a static butterfly in mid-flight (Sin titulo {Mariposa #2}, [Untitled Butterfly #2]), 2014), or a deck of cards spread out on a table (El problema de lo real [The Problem of the Real], 2011). The optical effect produced by the mirrors (for example, the butterfly is simply half of one reflected on a mirror's surface) carries the same suggestive power of Cornell's work, produced by an encounter between the expected and unexpected aspects of his assembly art. Thus, the boxes and showcases by both artists coincide in their articulation of scenes that invite wonder and curiosity as methods of reflection or speculation, whether it be through the juxtaposition of different objects or the use of mirrors to create optical effects--strategies linked to the intellectual legacy of Enlightenment-era rational recreations.<sup>2</sup>



THE PROBLEM OF THE REAL (SHOWCASE #2), 2011



THE PROBLEM WITH REAL (SHOWCASE #2) (SKETCH), 2011

Unlike Cornell's work, many of Torres-Alzaga's boxes and showcases reject any forms that approach two-dimensionality by suspend the pièce against the wall like a

painting. Works such as *The Problem of the Real and Untitled* [Butterfly #2] emphasize the central position of the body and demand to be seen in motion rather than perceived from a static point, strictly focus on the visual element, with this in mind, the body's centrality is a constant in Torres-Alzaga's production; in other words, what stands out in her total body of work is the performative nature of her sculptures and constructed objects. Such centrality implies a particular awareness and sensitivity toward the presence of the individual, the piece, and the exhibition space, as well as the series of interactions that may occur among them. It is well known that this kind of phenomenological considerations became emblematic of the redefinition of modern sculpture during the postwar era, especially in the case of minimalism. Robert Morris's production warrants discussion as part of this legacy. For example, Morris's *Untitled* (1965--1971) consists of four cubes covered in mirrors, arranged in a regular pattern on the floor, leaving enough space for spectators to walk among them. The piece has the potential to establish complex interactions with space and with the spectator, given the perceptual effects created by the reflections. A similar principle comes into play in Torres-Alzaga's sculptural series entitled *Lo que se esconde es lo que se revela* [What Is Hidden Is what Is Revealed] (2014). But unlike Morris's work, these three sculptures avoid any geometric or regular configuration, presenting a construction of glass and mirrors that, like some of the artist's other works, seeks to enable a more complex perception process and thus to establish a new relationship between the object, the spectator, and space. In this sense, they may be seen as variations on "primary structures" that seek to blur the outlines of their *gestalt*, in order to reemphasize the presence of the spectator's perceptual experience.

Some artists associated with minimalism, including Morris, produced works that accentuated the body's centrality even further, with the construction of corridors and labyrinths, for example. Torres-Alzaga has also done projects that take the form of labyrinths--which are also associated with the Baroque era--such as the piece presented in this exhibition at MARCO: *El espacio en medio* [The Space in Between], first shown in 2011. This is a labyrinth, formed by wooden modules holding large mirrors that create a complex spatial scene. This is partly owing to the reflections from the mirrors which show images of two people standing on either side on a single plane (the mirrors' surfaces). The barrier supposedly presented by one side of the mirror becomes indistinct, resulting in an image that unites two separate people. Here, the surface acts as an illusory screen that permits the union of two spectators divided by space.



THE SPACE IN BETWEEN, 2012

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Brett, *Force Fields: Phases of the Kinetic* (Barcelona: ACTAR/Museo d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2000), pp.52-54

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 153-155.

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