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Lluís Hortalà: Guillotina

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Lluís Hortalà (Olot, 1959) turns the *trompe-l'oeil* into a thinking machine. A strict training in traditional decorative painting techniques at the Van der Kelen Logelain school in Brussels followed by four years of constant, painstaking work in the workshop eventually leed to a trilogy that challenges the notion of art as a technology of power by examining its formal and material qualities.

The approach is seemingly frivolous, as would be a rococo tragicomedy: Hortalà personifie the vaniy of Marie Antoniette and the Contess Du Barry in two wooden structures that replicate the fireplace mantels in the salons of Versailles where these two women lived. The first of the two features a refined neoclassical style; the second has a insulting voluptuous, almost portnographic Bourbon flair.

As in a dance, the repetition of the two mantelpieces punctuates three chapters in which Hortalà follows the personal disputes between the two courtesans and their impact on eighteenth-century European diplomacy. Before long, a third actor appears: the museum –in the form of a baseboard from the Prado in Madrid, first, and next from the Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery in London. A product of the revolutionary times that brought the two women's lives to an end, the museum appears as the guillotine that abruptly ushered in a new era, along with an irreversible change in the status of art in the Western world.

The civilizing discourse of museums supposedly freed art from the seduction, the lavishness, and the deception that had formerly been attributed to the art of the nobility. Recovering the *trompe-l'oeil* enables Hortalà to reinstate the tension between the two worlds and propose alternative possibilities in the context of their interdependency. The ensemble of 'anachronic arrangements' which the artist displays in the exhibition challenges viewers from the perspective of the body itself, with a play of the eyes from which the gaze emerges. At the same time, acting upon the museum from what once was its opposite, they emerge as an intervention in the institutional status upon which current art is based.