

## MUNTADAS: ACTIVATING ARTIFACTS

Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture at UMBC, Fall 2015  
Conceptualized and curated by Niels Van Tomme



Muntadas, *About Academia* (production image), 2001, Courtesy of Irina Rozosvky

“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 longer period of time and in a certain place. It is an instrument to open up a discussion, especially in the university context.”

- Muntadas

### The project:

World-renowned multimedia artist Muntadas (Spain, 1942) will complete the second part of his critically acclaimed video-installation *About Academia* (2001) in an exhibition project conceived exclusively for the Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture. The project will include participatory educational aspects that actively engage UMBC students and faculty from across the humanities and social sciences, as well as the general audience.

Critical about the structure and function of the university system, the original installment of *About Academia* investigates the often-complex and contradictory relationship between the production of knowledge and the economic interests it generates, which increasingly entwines scholarly activities with the commodification of knowledge. As in previous works by Muntadas, the emphasis is on perception and a higher awareness of the ways in which information can be generated and understood. The work, a large three-part video projection, juxtaposes scrolling texts from Muntadas' research, alongside interviews with significant academic figures and imagery of various high-profile universities in the US,

highlighting their architectural characteristics. A “spatialized documentary,” the work encourages viewers to move along its three screens during its presentation, inviting a more involved viewing process. Whereas the original *About Academia* installs a critique from the perspective of the academic, its newly commissioned second part will further elaborate on the themes from the viewpoint of the student. To facilitate this, Muntadas will initiate and lead a special workshop, training UMBC students to independently complete the second part of the project. The goal is to transform students from passive receivers of knowledge to active participants within the academic framework.

“Muntadas: Activating Artifacts” will present the newly commissioned second part of *About Academia* alongside its original iteration in one large room-sized installation. The presentation is further expanded by a number of ‘study rooms,’ providing a broader contextualization for Muntadas’ multidisciplinary practice. These curated sections of works address corporate protocols and institutional critique, further elaborating on themes relevant to the *About Academia* piece. The ‘study rooms’ are designed to encourage faculty, students, and visitors to actively use the exhibition’s architectural installation while researching and/or discussing the themes under examination.

The exhibition consists of a dynamic series of public dialogues that engages UMBC faculty and students in an interdisciplinary conversation, involving scholars from the humanities and social sciences. Addressing the unique social, political, and economic contexts for universities in the Maryland region, these discussions will include neighboring academic institutions, as well as the general audience. A lecture by Muntadas and the aforementioned workshop will further accompany the project. Curator Niels Van Tomme will develop a special course geared specifically to non-art majors at UMBC. Taking the exhibition as a case study, the course introduces the specifics and methodologies of artistic research and its relationship to fields such as sociology and anthropology, considering the critical potential of contemporary art as an alternative tool for knowledge production. “Muntadas: Activating Artifacts” will result in a full-color book that innovatively presents the outcomes of the project, as well as a DVD featuring single-screen versions of the completed *About Academia* work.

#### The artist:



Antoni Muntadas (born in 1942 in Barcelona) is a multidisciplinary installation and media artist. Since 1971, Muntadas has lived and worked in New York City. He was a Research Fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT from 1977 to 1984,

and is currently Professor of the Practice at the MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology and visiting professor at the IUAV in Venice, Italy.

Through his work, Muntadas addresses social, political, and communications issues such as the relationship between public and private space within social frameworks. His works also often investigate channels of information and the ways they may be used to censor or promulgate ideas. He works in a variety of media, including photography, video, publications, the Internet, and multi-media installations.

He has exhibited throughout the world, including the Venice Biennale, Documenta VI 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, Berkeley Art Museum in California, Wexner Arts Center in Columbus, 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, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid.

The curator:

Niels Van Tomme (Belgium, 1977) is a New York-based curator, researcher, and critic working on the intersections of contemporary culture, politics, and aesthetics. He is currently employed as Visiting Curator at the Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture in Baltimore, where his exhibition project "Visibility Machines: Harun Farocki and Trevor Paglen" opened in the fall of 2013, and will travel to the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and Gallery 400 in Chicago starting from late 2014. Most recently, he curated "A Rough Guide to Hell" (P!, New York), Société Réaliste's first US solo-presentation, as well as the travelling exhibition "Where Do We Migrate To?" (Baltimore, New York, New Orleans, Karlstad) and the group show "Melancholy is not enough..." (Pavilion Unicredit, Bucharest). He is a Contributing Editor of ART PAPERS and publishes internationally in journals, magazines, and exhibition catalogues. Van Tomme has been a guest critic at M.I.T. (Cambridge), Parsons The New School for Design (New York), and Vassar College (Poughkeepsie), among others. His book "Aesthetic Justice" (co-edited with Pascal Gielen) is forthcoming from Antennae Series by Valiz, Amsterdam. Van Tomme is the guest editor of a special issue of ART PAPERS devoted to the theme "On Temporality" (Jan/Feb 2013). He is Adjunct Associate Professor in Visual Arts at UMBC.