



JUAN L. GOMEZ-PERALES

**GALLERY 1.1.1.
SCHOOL OF ART
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA**

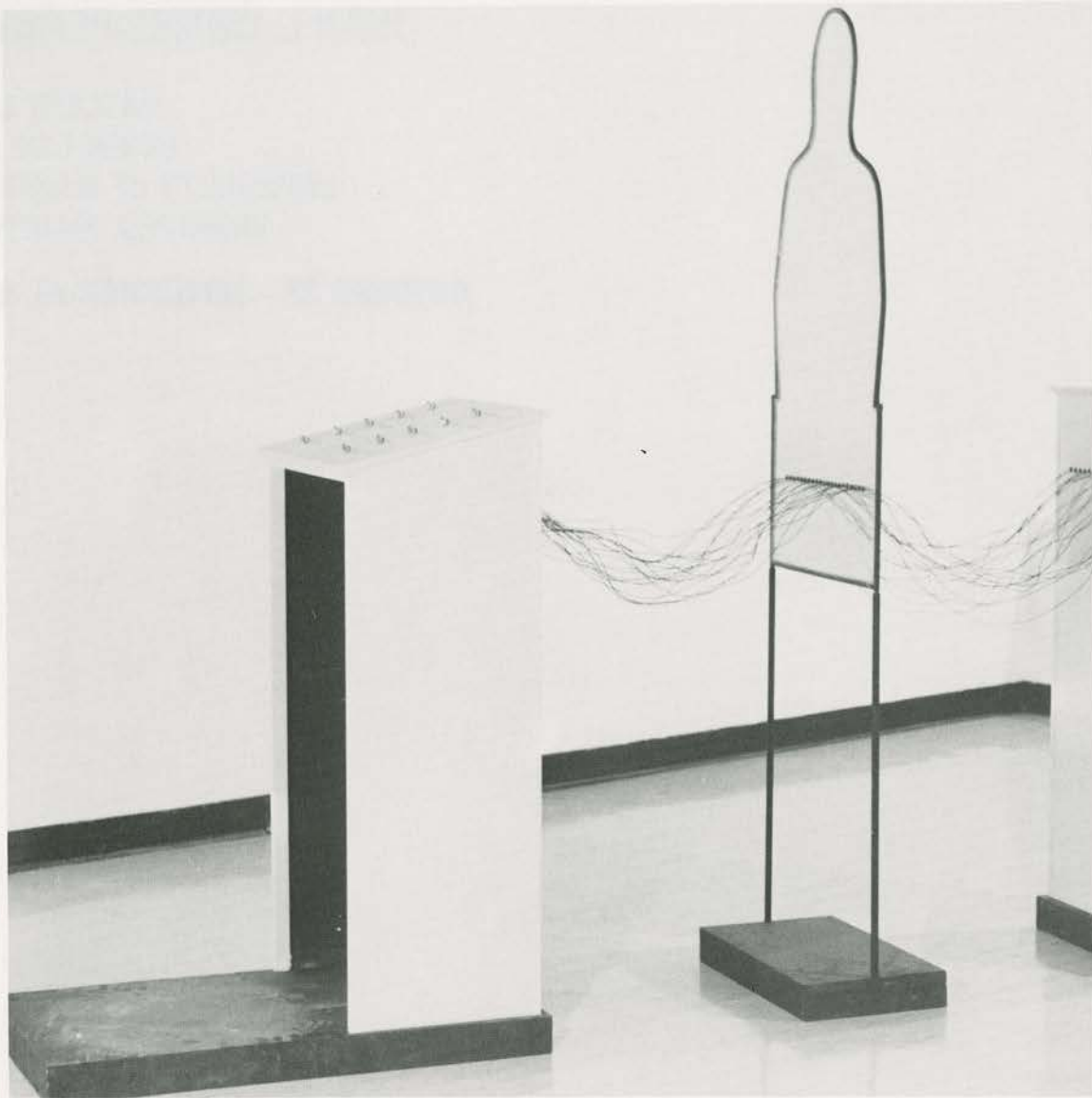
OCTOBER 23 – NOVEMBER 16, 1988



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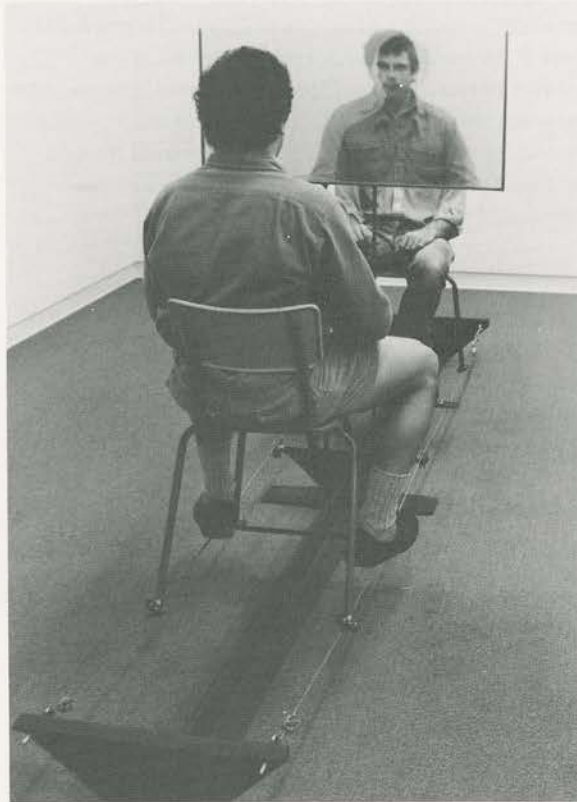


So, What Have You Been Up To (1987), detail

BEYOND FORMALITIES

Through the medium of participatory sculpture, Juan Gomez-Perales explores the complex dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The works are thoughtfully detailed, carefully constructed stages which beckon viewers to enter and complete the art by becoming involved with it. As free-standing sculpture the works are elegant in presentation. The true aesthetic, however, lies in the viewer's experience of becoming a participant rather than a mere spectator.

One reviewer recently described Gomez-Perales as a cunning "controlling animus."¹ "Animus" (Latin for



Opposing Chairs (1984)
collection: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

spirit) is a Jungian term for the personification of the unconscious, masculine side of a woman's personality, the inner man who acts as a bridge between the ego and the creative resources of the unconscious. Gomez-Perales does not actually "control" or manipulate the participants, but rather guides their imaginations by providing a series of logical and compelling visual cues. When the creative imagination of the participant is activated, the art is completed and comes alive.

Although the artist's intent is not to manipulate the participant, he recognizes that to a certain extent all art is manipulative.² The artist may provide the vocabulary, but the viewer is required to construct the story, supplying an individual, complex bundle of past experiences, biases, preconceptions, etc. The experience will be further affected by whomever you share it with. Since the human makeup of the individual informs the experience, each person's interpretation of the art is correct for that person.

Gomez-Perales himself is fascinated by people's responses to his work. It is a catalyst for communication not only among the participants, but also between them and the artist. Because the participants share part of the responsibility for the artistic occasion, it is to be hoped that they will approach it in an open-minded spirit.

Like many of his contemporaries, he is concerned about the restrictions imposed by gallery walls on our experience of art, and at times has shown his work outside their confines. *Tilt Table* (1984) was displayed in a restaurant in Victoria, B.C., as well as in a gallery (see photograph). This sculpture consists of a table and two chairs on a platform which swings out to the horizontal position when viewers enter the piece. There is a spirit level on each edge of the table facing each participant, which should signify the horizontal position; they are, however, slightly offset from each other. The point of initial interaction between the two viewers occurs when they try to

establish the horizontal position of the table, which is impossible to do. In the restaurant the participants are the customers, whose conscious activity goes on to the pleasures of eating, although subconsciously they are still trying to get level. Their responses to the piece tend to be more receptive and flexible than they would be in a gallery setting.

In the present exhibition Gomez-Perales explores ways of breaking down our preconceptions about the norms of behavior required by the gallery setting, and exposes in the process the restrictive nature of that setting. The visual cues provide the first step in this process, and the humour of the predicament created by each sculpture facilitates an energy release which helps to disrupt conventional expectations and attitudes.

Like Mowry Baden (in his comments on his exhibition of *Task-Oriented Sculptures*³), Gomez-Perales believes that the participant must proceed through several sequential stages in the experience of this art. First, there is a visual assessment of the work, then an assessment of what the experience might be like, and then a decision to act. Next, there is the actual physical and emotional involvement with the work, and possibly a re-evaluation of the original assessment. Later, in recollection that may perhaps be triggered by similar experiences, the participant engages in a process of speculation and interpretation. The major difference between Gomez-Perales' sculptures and Baden's, however, is that the latter only requires one participant for each piece, whereas the former usually requires an interpersonal encounter as well, which creates greater emotional and psychological complexity.

Both *Tilt Table* and *Opposing Chairs* (1984; see photograph), which require the relatively intimate interaction of a one-to-one encounter, are important pieces in the thematic development leading up to the present exhibition. In each work the participants are required to face each other and cooperate in the per-

formance of an activity. In *Opposing Chairs* a two-way mirror reflects the viewer's own image, superimposed on the image of the person sitting in the opposite chair; the mind constructs a single face from this dual image. The psychological implications are manifold. As an actual physical barrier, the mirror brings to mind the complex barriers to communication that can arise between two people, such as the phenomenon of psychological projection that is embodied in the window-mirror image itself—one cannot see the other person clearly. In a more positive light, the piece can be seen as suggesting that the blurring of individual identity may be an inevitable and not unpleasant fact of human interaction, and that we are never as complete or self-sufficient in ourselves as we might like to think.

In most of the works shown in this exhibition the number of participants is limited to two, and the emotional effects are intensified by this restriction. Some of the pieces suggest the dark side of human interactions, where the participants experience certain "ugly truths" or absurdities of social behavior. *So What Have You Been Up To* (1987; the only work here that has been previously shown⁴) explores the social predicament of encountering someone you feel you must stop to talk to, although at the moment you really have nothing to say. The participants step up to an electronic panel and view each other through a mylar-covered acrylic panel of human shape. As in *Opposing Chairs*, the panel both mirrors and reveals at the same time. The viewer's attention is drawn to the panel on which are provided a choice of the usual hackneyed expressions one hears in an encounter of this kind. As the viewer chooses one of the phrases it lights up on the other's panel, eliciting a response. Inevitably, both participants leave the platform with that familiar dissonant feeling of having had an unsatisfactory interaction with another person. This sculpture also provides a number of physical blocks representing the psychological blocks that prevent a meaningful interaction from taking place.

Many of the works in this exhibition offer metaphoric images similar to the blocks which function as signs or thematic indicators. These devices signify a departure from the artist's previous work which focussed primarily on participants' direct experience, and they reveal a conscious elaboration of his role as guide.

Gomez-Perales' architectural background can be discerned in the way he sets his stages, with the close eye and technological expertise of an architect designing the entrance of a building. A black platform with footprints on it announces, "It's okay to step up here." A lever, button, trigger, pulley sets the process in motion, an image triggers the imagination, a response creates another response.

Like the architect, Gomez-Perales is interested in solving the technological problems of design and construction which arise from an originating idea. Unlike the architect, however, he does not work out his problems on paper, but in the physical process of manipulating his materials. In this respect his activity resembles that of the participants who later experience his work. The results of his dynamic creative process are simplicity, elegance and a clear plan for movement.



Tilt Table (1984)

Reviewers have described Juan Gomez-Perales' work as playful, adventurous, light-hearted, and revealing without being moralizing. Indeed, an opening to a show in Victoria took on a carnival atmosphere when the visitors began to involve themselves in the work. It is possible, however, that the serious intent of his art has been underestimated. In the past he has focussed on revealing the underlying absurdities of accepted social behaviors, including those of the art opening itself. In this current work, the limiting of the number of participants in most of the pieces to two indicates a sharper focus on the discomfiting dichotomy between the formalities of social experience and the desire for authentic human contact.

There is a consonance between the social and aesthetic concerns of this exhibition. The emphasis here is on an interdependence which blurs the subject-object relationship, both between people, and between the spectator and the work of art.⁵ Gomez-Perales' work challenges our perception of human relations and space relations, moving us not only physically, but imaginatively as well.

Notes:

1. Elizabeth Godley, "A Hands-on Art Show We Can All Enjoy," *The Vancouver Sun*, July 10, 1987.
2. Interview with the artist, June 15, 1988.
3. Andre Jodain, *Mowry Baden, Task-Oriented Sculptures*, Mercer Union, Toronto, 1987.
4. Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, 1987
5. The latter issue is being explored as well by some of Gomez-Perales' contemporaries in sculpture, such as Jonathan Borofsky, Kim Adams, Mowry Baden, and others. See for example Joseph Woodward's review, "Six Projects for Surrey," *Santa Barbara News Press*, January 14, 1984.

Ruth M. Gregory is a freelance curator.
Winnipeg, August, 1988



So, What Have You Been Up To (1987)



Voisins (1987)



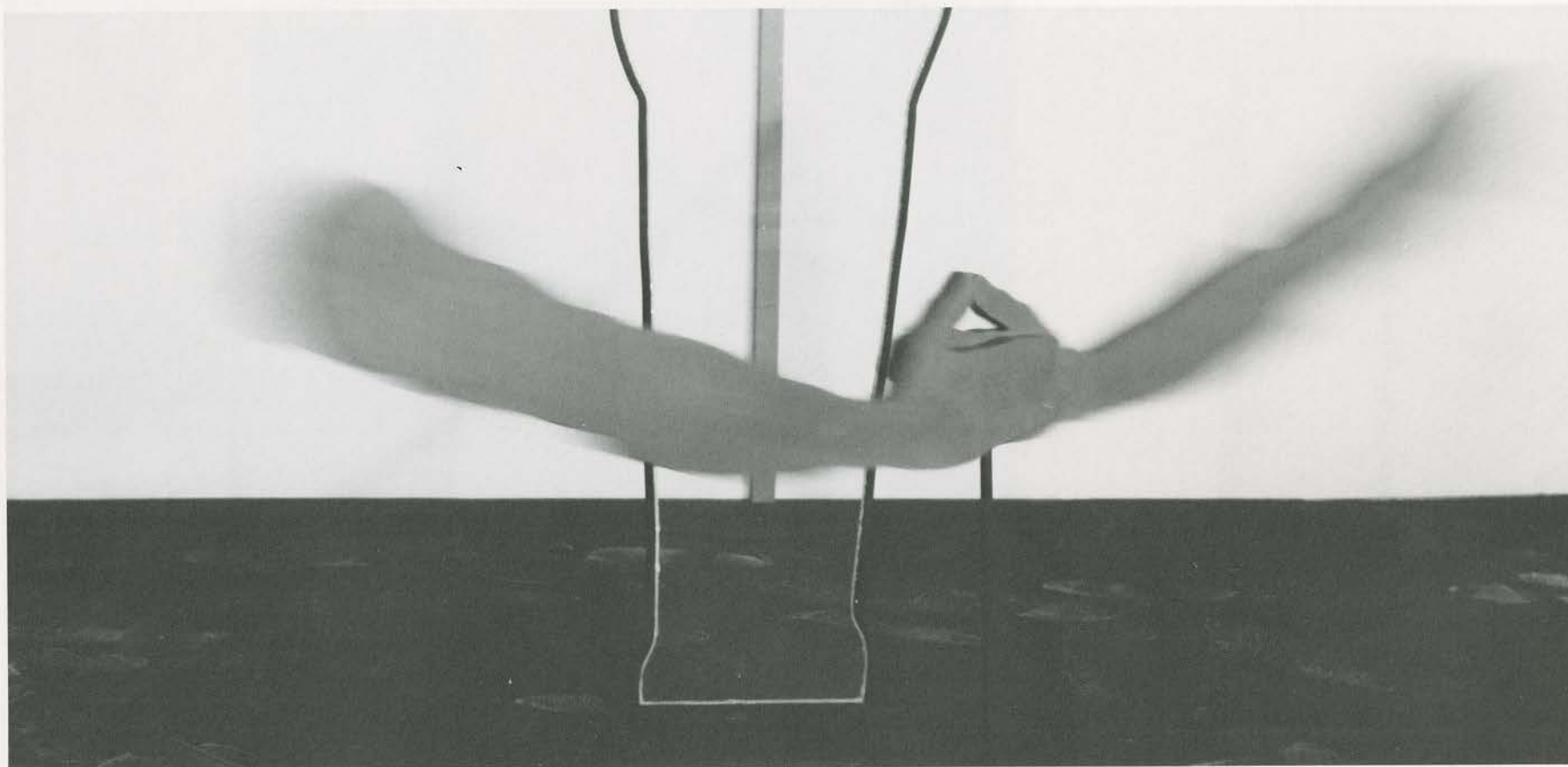
Voisins (1987), detail



Castle (1988)

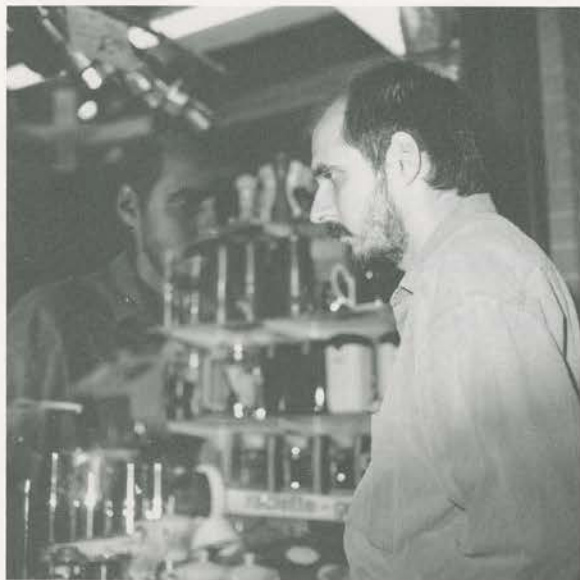


The Tango (1988)



The Tango (1988), detail

JUAN L. GOMEZ-PERALES



Born: Madrid, Spain 1957
Residence: Montréal, Québec

- 1978 B.E.S.(Arch.) University of Manitoba
- 1983 B.F.A.(Hons.) University of Manitoba
- 1985 M.F.A. University of Victoria
- 1986-88 Lecturer, School of Art, University of Manitoba
- 1988- Assistant Professor, Concordia University, Montréal

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1988 Gallery 1.1.1., Winnipeg, Man.
- 1987 Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver B.C.
- 1985 Pitt International Galleries, Vancouver B.C.
- 1985 McPherson Gallery, Victoria B.C.
- 1984 (N)on Commercial Gallery, Vancouver B.C.
- 1984 McPherson Gallery, Victoria B.C.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1988 Mississauga Art Gallery, Mississauga Ont.
- 1988 Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredricton N.B.
- 1988 The Nickel Arts Museum, Calgary Alta.
- 1988 Concordia Art Gallery, Montréal P.Q.
- 1988 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria B.C.
- 1988 The Nickel Arts Museum, Calgary Alta.
- 1988 Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax N.S.
- 1987 "Salon del Toro", Soria Spain
- 1987 London Regional Art Gallery, London Ont.
- 1987 The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg Man.
- 1986 Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver B.C.
- 1986 Open Space Gallery, Victoria B.C.
- 1985 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria B.C.
- 1985 Pitt International Galleries, Vancouver B.C.
- 1984 "The Warehouse Show", Vancouver B.C.
- 1984 St. Andrews College Gallery, Winnipeg, Man.
- 1983 Gallery 111, Winnipeg, Man.
- 1982 Janet Ian Cameron Gallery, Winnipeg Man.
- 1982 Cardigan Milne Gallery, Winnipeg Man.
- 1982 National Museum of Art, Lima Peru
- 1981 Leonard Marcoe Gallery, Winnipeg Man.

COLLECTIONS

- Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria B.C.
- Salon del Toro, Soria Spain

AWARDS

- 1988 Canada Council, Arts Grant "B"
- 1987 Manitoba Arts Council, Visual Arts Grant
- 1986 Manitoba Arts Council, Short Term Project Grant
- 1984 University of Victoria, Graduate Scholarship
- 1983 University of Manitoba, Gold Medal – Fine Arts

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Salon del Toro*, Sala de la Delegación Provincial de Cultura, Soria Spain, 1987 (catalogue)
- Young Contemporaries*, London Regional Art Gallery 1987 (catalogue)
- 1987 Contemporary Art in Manitoba*, Winnipeg Art Gallery 1987 (catalogue)
- The Vancouver Courier*, Aug.19,1987 by Jill Pollack (review)
- The Vancouver Sun*, July 10,1987 by Elizabeth Godley (review)
- The Province*, (Vancouver) July 6,1987 by Art Perry (review)
- The Globe and Mail*, Dec.20,1986 by Steven Godfrey (review)
- Broken Muse*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1986/87 (catalogue)
- The Vancouver Sun*, Nov.8,1986 by Elizabeth Godley (review)
- Vanguard*, Oct./Nov.1986 by Erich Ranfft (review)
- Issue Magazine*, Jan./Feb.1985 by Mary Ellen Lower (review)
- Warehouse Show*, Vancouver,1984 (catalogue)

WORKS IN EXHIBITION

So, What Have You Been Up To

1987

wood, steel, two-way mirror, acrylic, switches, lights, wires
3.230 x .530 x 1.930

Voisins

1987

wood, steel, radios, aquarium, two goldfish
approx. 4.880 x 1.830 x 2.130

Castle

1988

wood, steel, plastic, chairs, chess game
approx. 3.660 x 1.220 x .810

The Tango

1988

wood, steel, acrylic, motor, vision tester, slides
4.800 x 3.650 x 1.980

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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