

# sculpture

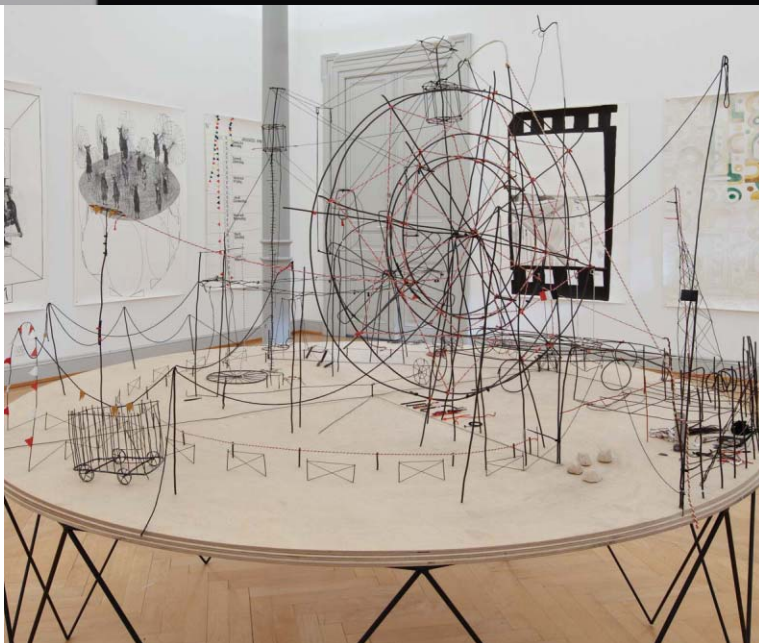
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**Lucy + Jorge Orta**  
**Lucía Vallejo**  
**Ante Timmermans**







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**On the Cover:** Lucy + Jorge Orta, *Life Line—Survival Kit*, 2008–09. Steel frame, taps, piping, various textiles, acrylic paint, webbing, flask, float, bucket, toys, rope, and whistle, 150 x 80 x 15 cm. Photo: Bertrand Huet, courtesy the artists.

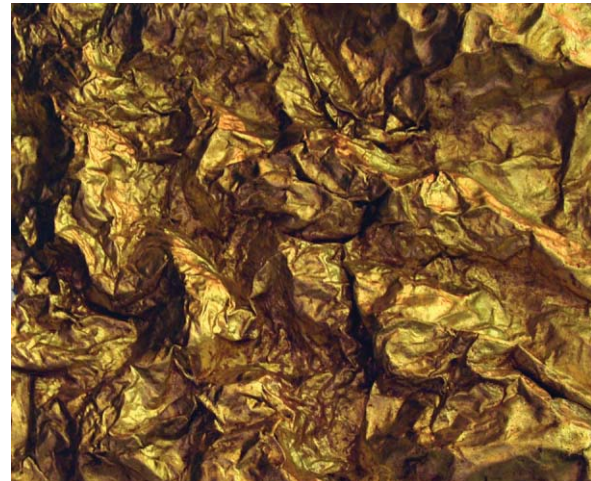


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# Sculpting the Void

A Conversation with

**Lucía  
Vallejo**

BY PAULA LLULL,  
TRANSLATED BY TATIANA FLORES

COURTESY THE ARTIST



Lucía Vallejo began her career as an art historian. The subject of her research, Giorgione, foreshadowed the path of her later artistic trajectory, which follows a deep interest in symbolism and late Renaissance and Baroque color. Despite having talent for the plastic arts since childhood (her first sculpture was a skull) and being told by a professor at the London School of Arts that she was an artist and not a historian, Vallejo did not make the change until several years ago, when she had her first solo show in Mallorca, Spain.

She began her career with cut-out photographs and pierced canvases in which the interplay of light and shadow creates a dramatic quality that has since become characteristic of her work. In the search to create volume from two-dimensional media, she then took another step and began sculpting the canvas by making wrinkles and cuts while maintaining a certain horizontality in the cloth that allowed it to be viewed as a painting. Her most recent works have evolved yet again. The linen support has now become fully sculptural and volumetric, with nooks and crannies that give the impression of randomly draped cloth. Viewers often cannot help touching, wanting to experience fully an intrinsic materiality whose symbolic nature embraces important emotional overtones.

In each phase of her work, and as an indissoluble part of her development, Vallejo has been perfecting a meticulous approach to pure color and texture inspired by Old Master technique. For her, the preparation of the canvas and the mixture of the pigments are as important as the final result, and she trusts that the viewer is conscious of this. Though frequent visits to the Prado Museum (Vallejo resides in Madrid) are a continuing source of inspiration, her works are profoundly contemporary in their psychological and conceptual focus.

**Paula Llull:** *Even in your earliest works, your materials carry a specific weight. You use two-dimensional supports like photographs or canvases that you then cut to make into sculptures. You also use the interplay of light and shadow to achieve a three-dimensionality that yields, in some cases, very poetic and suggestive scenographic results.*

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Opposite: *Absence I*, 2012. Oil on canvas and wood, 210 x 40 x 30 cm. Above: *Nebu* (detail), 2012. Gold on canvas, 176 x 220 cm.





Above: *Nebu*, 2012. Gold on canvas, 176 x 220 cm. Below: *Corruption*, 2012. Gold on canvas, 80 x 70 cm.



*Does your search involve only an analysis of formal possibilities or is there a subjectivity beyond the process?*

**Lucía Vallejo:** I am very attracted to the idea of taking something two-dimensional and giving it three dimensions. It is a constant struggle against gravity. However, my work also has a very personal component because my anxieties and fears appear in all of my pieces. *Absence I*, for example, my most recent sculptural piece, sums up my fear of the void, of absence and nothingness.

**PL:** *The technique, materials, and theatricality of your recent works recall Baroque art, and you have mentioned a feeling of strong identification with the materiality in Zurbarán's works.*

**LV:** It is no coincidence that the Baroque inspires me—the void and anxiety over the passage of time were recurring themes in that period. Baroque art not only appeals to me aesthetically, I also identify completely with its symbolism, its fear of the void, its fascination with the passage of time, with death. I once read that Baroque *vanitas* paintings “denounced the relativity of knowledge and of the human race to the passage of time and death,” and that is a constant in my work. It is subconscious, but it is always there.

One of my previous exhibitions expressed the idea of the *vanitas* through the fragility of spider webs. Two of the works were titled *Fragilidad* (*Fragility*) and *Hold Time*, which was about enclosing time in a display case. I cut out canvases, pierced them, and encapsulated them in a vitrine—it was about the fear of time passing.

COURTESY THE ARTIST





*Arâneae I*, 2010. Oil on canvas and motor, 70 x 30 x 30 cm. 2 views of work, stationary and in motion.

Another work, *Motherhood*, transmitted my fears about giving birth—I had problems with my first pregnancy and almost died—and my obsession with shadows. And now, though my work has evolved, I am again trying to sculpt the void, just in a different way. This is how you could sum up my work. I use canvases, elements that are completely two-dimensional, and by folding them, I attempt to challenge the weight of the cloth itself and sculpt the void. For that, I am inspired by antique sculptures, by the pleats in clothing.

**PL:** Do you want the viewer to be aware of the process behind your works?

**LV:** Yes, the process of creation forms an integral part of the concept. The materials themselves are very important. I use the same techniques and materials that artists used hundreds of years ago. I seek purity of color, just like the Pre-Raphaelites in their search for origins. There are no synthetic materials in my works. I am a purist in terms of technique, so it is like a return to roots. I use pure linen, natural varnishes and pigments. I prepare the grounds and the same colors, without blends, which allows me to make unique shades. I even prepare golds in the traditional manner, using clay bole.

In this respect, I identify with the Pre-Raphaelites. I believe that they also lived in an era of significant technological change, which prompts a nostalgic look to the past. Nevertheless, I want to make clear that, despite this search for origins in my technique, I have

no intention of copying the Old Masters. I am inspired by the past, but I produce contemporary results. Their methods are my path for giving volume to the void. I am not artisanal in my approach; I would define myself as a purist. An important part of the concept behind my work resides in the purity of the materials. At this moment, I am working on craquelure. It is another way of confronting modernity and its yearning for perfection, bringing imperfections to light.

**PL:** Why do you use painting techniques to achieve sculptural results?

**LV:** It wouldn't have much point for me if I used materials that were already three-dimensional. I challenge myself to give volume to the void without resorting to solid materials, to confront gravity and fight against a collapsible material—canvas—to give it rigidity. Doing so is much more mysterious. I like that my work causes people to reflect and that things are not as expected. Viewers always want to touch my work.

**PL:** Do you have any influences in modern or contemporary art?

**LV:** There are things that I've taken away from the work of several artists. From Lucio Fontana, his *concetto spaziale*. From Louise Bourgeois, her strength and how she presents her internal life, fears, and feelings. And from Anish Kapoor, the use of natural pigments.

*Paula Llull is a curator and writer living in Australia.*



