

Macchi in Perspective. A Conversation between Jorge Macchi and Agustín Pérez Rubio

APR: Let's start at the beginning, because there are areas of your production and of your life that I am not familiar with and that, I imagine, might be interesting. Your childhood, for instance. How did you come into contact with art? I would like to know how and why you got your start, your family's connection to art, what art there was in your environment, what you could not understand, that sort of thing.

JM: Drawing was always easy for me. I always liked it and I liked learning—I'm talking about when I was nine or ten years old. In grade school, we would make a poster for every national holiday—I don't think school kids do that anymore—with the crossing of the Andes or the making of the flag, stuff like that. They would always ask me to make those posters. I remember now one I did of San Martín crossing the Andes. It was full of horses, soldiers, and mountains. I loved it. And, of course, I also loved it when they would say, "He draws so well."

APR: Well, it was something that earned you acceptance and recognition from others, right? Did you feel different as a kid?

JM: I don't really think I was very introverted as a kid. I had two older brothers, which was a plus socially. Then came my teenage years—which were not easy for me.

APR: They aren't easy for anyone.

JM: I got into the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires,¹ which is run by the Universidad de Buenos Aires. I started in 77, and the military coup had happened in 76. I graduated in 82. Democracy was restored in 83.

APR: So, for you, the entire dictatorship period was tied to high school.

JM: It was tied to being a teenager, to the issue of sex, to the fact that I had to study hard. Greater responsibility. For me, it was a dark period, a feeling like "oh no, night has fallen." But there are indications that it was a personal problem, because I later met up with others who had gone to high school at that time and they have fantastic memories. (*Laughter.*) I realized that I could relate better with the studious types, the boring kids who spent a lot of time indoors.

APR: You turned inwards. How did you channel your artistic side?

JM: I can't remember anything about the first two years of high school—what I did, what I drew. When I was in my third year, my father died suddenly. I was fifteen and it was quite a blow. It forms part of the strange and dark feeling I have about those years.

APR: Was that when you turned inward, or were you always like that?

JM: It's hard to say. I think I tended to introspection from a young age, but when I started high school something started happening, a sort of breeding ground began to form and later grew and grew. You know how there are explosive teenagers? Well, I was an implosive one—which was not very healthy. I mean, it's sort of sad.

APR: At around that time you started studying piano. That was your first artistic outlet.

JM: I took classes with a teacher in my neighborhood. We didn't have a piano at home, so the teacher would let me use hers a few afternoons a week. Then my mother bought me a piano.

¹ A prestigious public high school in Buenos Aires.—Trans.

APR: Didn't you play the guitar first? I mean, the usual thing is to begin with the guitar, a band, something like that.

JM: No, I was the polar opposite of all that, of course. I studied hard and played piano three hours a day.

APR: What's your relationship to discipline like? Because your work always seems very open and intuitive, but also exceedingly precise. Like two sides of a coin. It looks as if everything has happened by chance, but that's actually a lie. And I think you have maneuvered between those two extremes: intuition and chance, on the one hand, and strict discipline, on the other. What was that like back then?

JM: When I started studying piano, I didn't say "I like this." I don't actually know whether or not I liked it. What I said was "I'm going to study piano." And I did. What I mean is, I'm not sure if I did things because I wanted to or because they came to me. That's the way it was with art. It came to me. And with music I really buckled down, exercising a great deal of will power, but it didn't work. I had trouble reading the scores, so I learned works by heart. Besides, I wasn't really sure what I was doing it for, but that's another...

APR: I hear you talking about repeating, memorizing and repeating... These are things that later show up in your work. Take *Vidas paralelas* [Parallel Lives], those panes of glass that repeat and then re-condense. And look what happens when you simply remember your teenage years at the piano. There are, I think, some small things that remain, structures you have learned, modes of language and play, syntax, that later turn up whether you want them to or not, right?

JM: Probably.

APR: What was your life like in those teenage years?

JM: At the same time, while I was exercising all that will power, I was also making fantastical drawings—probably as a way to let off steam. I would draw animals in outlandish shapes, dreamlike landscapes. I really liked Magritte, for example. I really liked Roger Dean, a draftsman—an illustrator, mostly—who did the covers for the English band Yes.

APR: And where did those dreamlike drawings take you?

JM: Nowhere, I just made them.

APR: And did the piano and the drawings ever intersect?

JM: They were two totally different worlds.

APR: I am interested in how the combination of your family and the political context affected you in those years.

JM: They couldn't say much because I studied all the time, I was a straight-A student. I played the piano and I made my drawings. They never asked anything more of me.

APR: And what was your experience of the political situation at the time?

JM: My parents never said a word about the topic. In that sense, my case was totally different from other families. My mother and father were both petrified, even if my father didn't show it. They would hear nothing of my being a rebel or getting involved in politics. They knew that that was extremely dangerous, even though they never told me exactly why. I always had the feeling there was something dangerous lurking.

APR: When did that stage come to an end?

JM: In those years, when you graduated from my high school, the Colegio Nacional Buenos Aires, you went straight to any professional or graduate school you wanted, with no entrance exam.

APR: You didn't have to take an exam?

JM: No, because that high school was part of the Universidad de Buenos Aires system and you had been trained to go straight to graduate or professional school. Everyone else had to take a year-long preparatory course and take exams. No one got in, it was really hard. There were only a few places. So, when those six years of intensive study were over, I was given the forms. "Go ahead and choose any area you want. Don't worry about anything, we will sign you up, you don't have to do a thing." "That's great," I said. Then I started looking at the options on the form and there was nothing I liked, not a thing. It was not something that happened to me all of a sudden; I knew that something was not right, but when I saw the list of schools I said to myself, "Nothing, absolutely nothing, is right here. What have you gotten yourself into?" I had the feeling that I'd been studying without any purpose. I was so desperate that I chose medicine—my father had been a doctor. In part because I was thinking, "The office is all set up, right? I guess the patients will come along."

APR: A sort of family tradition.

JM: Anyway, at the same time, my sister—who had seen my drawings—could tell that I was not very convinced. She said, "Why don't you enroll in art school?" I was torn between the music conservatory, art school and medical school. I could go straight to medical school and, besides, that was what my mother wanted. I could tell that something was not right with music, though, so I lay back a bit. In terms of art, it came easy to me but I had no particular tie to museums; I had never gone to art galleries, I didn't know any artists or anything like that.

APR: You never had the impulse to take a look at things, to copy works by other artists?

JM: No, I did do that. In fact, Magritte was an artist I liked a lot back then. I had a few art history books, I had taken art at school—I was interested in it. But it was not like I knew "that's for me." But, regardless, I opted for art school. That was the only school I had to take an exam to get into. I went, took the drawing test and then a test in general culture. I passed. Then I had the entire summer to decide what to do with my life. My mother put me in touch with doctors so that I could go talk to them, to see if they could change my mind.

APR: How typical!

JM: I went away and, finally, when I came back, I said, "I'm going to study art." It was a blind leap, I didn't have a clue what it meant. So I went to the medical school and withdrew my enrollment.

APR: When you first went to the university in 83, what did you find?

JM: It was not a university, really, it was an art school: the Prilidiano Pueyrredón, which is now the Universidad Nacional de las Artes (UNA). I began to receive a traditional, formal education in painting. The first two years were comprehensive with classes in sculpture, painting, drawing, printmaking, and a few in art history. That was where I met my peers, the people who would be close to me in those years: Pablo Siquier, Miguel Rothschild, Ernesto Ballesteros. They were all in my group, a small group that was like an extension of high school, because art school was also broken down into sections.

APR: What was the relationship between you like? What made you stay in school?

JM: The group was fun and I liked the lifestyle, but there were gaps that had to do with the dictatorship and what it meant in Argentina. In the sixties, there was great upheaval and excitement...

then came the dictatorship and there was no connection between one thing and the other. It was as if the bridges had been burned. I had no idea whatsoever what the [Instituto] Di Tella was.² My training and experience in the world of contemporary art were nil. One day, Pablo Siquier showed up at school with a Tàpies book.

APR: Oh, so we have something in common.

JM: I looked at it and said, “This is a wonder.” And I set out to make work just like Tàpies’s, as did Pablo. The strange thing is, we had that book in our hands...

APR: Whereas you didn’t know a thing about the local Informalists...

JM: Exactly! I didn’t know a thing about any of that and, what’s more, Tàpies came into my world twenty or thirty years late. There was no Internet or art bookstores. There was one bookstore where you could find some Pop stuff. That was our idea of what was going on in the art world. Tàpies—his textures, his materials—was a sort of revolution. And that was 1985...

APR: A little late. What about shows?

JM: I rarely went. In 85, an art history professor, Bárbara Bustamente, asked us if we went to galleries. She was a very good teacher. Well, one of the shows she told us to go see was by an artist named Blas Castagna, at the Van Riel Gallery. I went to see it and was as dazzled as I had been by Tàpies. Actually, their work was related because Castagna would find things on the street and make these great assemblages. I was astonished. And Van Riel, who was there at the time, gave me the artist’s phone number. “Call him up,” he said. “Other artists call him up and go over to his house.” It took me six months to call him. He invited me over and I took the things I was working on, which were obviously inspired by the show of his I had seen. I was hyper-Blas Castagna. I took everything in. Castagna was an ascetic: he used the minimum to create. He had a very religious conception and he admired the Gothics, Giotto. He even had a reproduction of the Giotto fresco *Saint Francis Preaching to the Birds* at his house. And I would tell him that I liked that too. There was some sort of religious feeling that I can’t pin down.

APR: More spiritual than religious.

JM: Yes, but the symbology was Catholic. Anyway, I made that kind of work for a long time and I worked really hard. I had a studio in a house in the La Boca section of the city, an enormous house that was about to be sold where my father had lived as a boy. In 86, I decided to set up my studio in an empty room of that house; the people who were living there had left because, supposedly, it was going to be sold. But it didn’t sell. So I told my mom that we should rent it out to artists as studios. And it filled up.

APR: Were the tenants friends of yours or people from the neighborhood?

JM: This is what happened: around the time I set up that studio, Ernesto Ballesteros told me that a group of artists were going to get together with Enio Iommi because he wanted to talk to us. I knew Iommi’s work, but I didn’t know him personally. Thirteen or fourteen of us got together and met him at a bar. He told us, in that harsh way he had, that we were a bunch of idiots for thinking that we could do things on our own. To sum up a very long conversation, he told us that the only solution was for us to join forces. That meeting gave rise to the idea of forming a group. We were not united by an aesthetic vision, but we started to get together and it was fun.

² The Instituto Torcuato Di Tella was a world-renowned center of experimentation in the arts in the sixties.—
Trans.

APR: But who was it exactly?

JM: Pablo Siquier, Ernesto Ballesteros, Ana Gallardo, Andrea Racciatti, Gladys Nistor, Enrique Ježik, Juan Paparella, Marita Causa, Gustavo Figueroa, Martín Pels, and Carolina Antoniadis. And some of them set up studios in the house in La Boca, which turned into an interesting center.

APR: What year was that?

JM: That first meeting was in 86, and in 87 we had a show at the [Museo] Castagnino in Rosario.

APR: A show as a group?

JM: Yes, as the Grupo de la X.

APR: You were all so different from one another on stylistic and conceptual levels. It was a group of people from more or less the same generation working together thanks to that conversation with Enio... How interesting that he said, "You can't make it alone." How did the Grupo de la X take shape?

JM: It was a gradual process. It started thanks to that contact with Enio Iommi and with Jorge López Anaya, an influential critic at the time. They pulled some strings so that we could start to have shows. We were given a show in the Castagnino even though they didn't know who we were.

APR: And what sort of work did you show at that time?

JM: I had, on the one hand, some assemblages in wood and other materials that I'd find on the street and, on the other, I'd started to paint on pieces of paper—also found. I would rip down advertising posters and stick them together to make large planes that I would then paint on.

APR: What was the place of that work in the Argentine painting tradition?

JM: By that time, we had seen [Guillermo] Kuitca's work. He had a great show of seven enormous stage set paintings at Galería del Buen Ayre. [Juan José] Cambre and [Martín] Reyna were also around. There was mostly painting, though I do remember sculptures by [Aldo] Paparella.

APR: We're still talking about the eighties.

JM: We had a show in Rosario in 87 that then came to Buenos Aires, to the Museo Sívori. The group opened up, began to include other people of the same generation. And so López Anaya, who had backed the group from the get-go, took some of those artists to exhibit work at the Ruth Benzacar Gallery, where he was a consultant. I was in a group show there in 88.

APR: Do you remember what you showed that time?

JM: Yes, I showed all the paintings on found and assembled pieces of paper. One year later, I got in touch with Alberto Elía's gallery, and I had two shows there.

APR: What years was that?

JM: In 89 and 90.

APR: Had you traveled to Europe? Did the Grupo de la X have any contacts there?

JM: No, traveling to Europe was not a possibility for us.

APR: But Fundación Antorchas was around at that time, right? What contacts did you have with other contexts?

JM: Antorchas was around, that's right. In 89, I went to see the São Paulo Biennial, and I remember that the Argentine participation was Kuitca, [Alfredo] Prior, and [Diulio] Pierri—three very painterly painters. I also remember a very small show of work by a Dutch artist named Marinus Boezem that I loved. The show consisted of clean, purchased objects placed one next to the other to make images... I'm not sure what I was drawn to.

APR: Did you have a point of reference among conceptual artists in the strictest sense? I am thinking of people like [Horacio] Zabala with his prison floor plans and [Alejandro] Puente, say.

JM: The only artist of that sort I had any contact with at the time was [Victor] Grippo. I knew Puente as a painter.

APR: It surprises me how we are often unaware of what's right beside us due to questions of generation, context, or artistic structure.

JM: I think that was heightened by the political context. The further we get from the Argentine military dictatorship, the more clearly I see that it was a strategy: cut Argentine history in two as if they had said, "OK, that came this far and now we will make it disappear and start something new"—which is obviously a lie.

APR: We were talking about your first show with Alberto Elía and then the São Paulo Biennial. What was the second show at Alberto Elía's gallery like, the one that took place in 90? That exhibition marked a change. You showed domes there and the artist we now know as Macchi began to appear.

JM: There was a change. I started making those paintings that seemed like holy places, like churches, and some triptychs, objects that, as they opened up, exposed other images and gave rise to other readings.

APR: That was when you showed the leg with the nails. Where did that come from? Were these ex-votos?

JM: They may have had something to do with ex-votos, but more with those images in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* of couples in the water with legs sticking out... And with Bruegel.

APR: It was at this point that things that would later appear a great deal in your work first emerged: that idea of the image-poem, a dome with rain or torches falling inside, or a piece of wood with a leg but also nails... What I mean is, a relationship between the object and the painting to form an image, wouldn't you say?

JM: I'd say that what first appeared at that show that would later develop in my work was the coexistence of spatial illusion and dense reality; the creation of interior spaces like the churches, on the one hand, and stains of an array of materials on the canvas, on the other.

APR: Do you think Guillermo Kuitca's work exercised some influence on the opera scenes or other works of yours with constructed illusions? Or are they more related to the baroque tradition? A lot has been said about the baroque in your work, but I don't really see it.

JM: Neither do I, really, except for maybe in the domes—in that idea of religious architecture. Using pictorial means to create a spatial illusion and then placing on the surface of the canvas stains or materials in order to accentuate the fact that the painting behind is just an illusion. I'm not really sure why I did that. But I think that I returned to it in *La ascension* [The Ascension], the installation I did in Venice in 2005. In that installation, there is, on the one hand, a ceiling fresco depicting the ascension of the Virgin Mary and, on the other, an object in the real space—a trampoline. Though I didn't realize

it at the time, the work in Venice was a new twist on those paintings. There is a sort of struggle, opposition, or contradiction between the painting's illusion and the object's presence.

APR: In all those pieces, you mostly worked from the place of painting. But the next step, in my view, consisted of turning the object as such into poem, illusion.

JM: Something similar is at play in the paintings from 91 and 92: an illusion of space that is in conflict with a very present and palpable material.

APR: Yes, an illusion limited to an object.

JM: A depth that is denied by the support.

APR: What was the response to those two shows?

JM: Favorable, I think. In 1991, Philippe Cyroulnik organized a show of four Argentine artists entitled *L'Atelier de Buenos Aires* at CREDAC, an institution in Ivry-sur-Seine. He was the director of that place and, in 89, he first came to Buenos Aires as a juror for the Premio Gunther. He got to know all the artists here (he still comes to Buenos Aires, in fact). For that show, he chose four artists: Roberto Elía, Pablo Suárez, Martín Reyna, and me.

APR: Did you have the chance, once you were in Paris, to contact other Argentine artists? A lot of great artists were living there, some still are. Did you have a fellowship there?

JM: No. I went for the show at CREDAC and then to travel around Europe. I was obsessed with Gothic architecture, especially with Notre Dame. I was overwhelmed when I walked into it for the first time. It was cold out and the cathedral was empty; the silence was absolute. Five or six people went in with me. They gathered at a small chapel in the back to hear a very intimate mass—I participated from afar as an onlooker. That's what happens to me: I have a muddled religious sentiment. I love those situations but—and I'm not sure if this is the right word—I don't commune.

APR: Maybe it's not spirituality or religion, but an idea of the sublime.

JM: That's the word.

APR: There's a lot of disdain for that idea in contemporary art because it's almost like an aspiration to absolute truth, to reach a state close to the spiritual from which things are perceived differently. A house of worship always gives you something to think about; in that silence, you find yourself one way or another. Your installation at Yokohama was amazing because you had to be there. And, at the end, the pause and total darkness put your body and your mind in a very special situation. I think that has to do with the idea of the sublime.

JM: It's also related to formal questions: Gothic cathedrals were designed in a certain way so that you would feel a certain thing. Those high ceilings and ribs and the light coming in through stained-glass windows... Those guys were amazing formalists. There is no text there, what I mean is, there is no text that tells you what to feel: you just walk in and the form makes an impact on you. Sometimes I think that that is what I would like to be able to accomplish in my work, that there be absolutely no need for translation. A work wholly inaccessible to text—sheer experience. I have only rarely been able to make that happen.

APR: It's sensorial, related to the body. The viewer's body is placed in a relationship where the body itself is what generates the concept. Still, what I find interesting is how you then undermine that relationship.

JM: That undermining is, for me, totally linked to Marinus Boezem: what is above is below; what is sublime, earthly. The duality of concepts is very fluid in his work, and I think that a lot of that makes itself felt in my work as well. Anyway, that was my first trip to Europe.

APR: You were overwhelmed.

JM: Completely. And the presence of Pablo Suárez was very important to that trip. He was an astounding intellectual and a very well-informed and cultivated guy, but his comments could be really cruel. Even though it could be said that we did not have a good relationship, on that trip he told me two or three things that turned out to be important to me. I remember that we went to see a Haim Steinbach show at the Yvon Lambert Gallery. What you saw were some shelves with two or three helmets and a fan and, painted on a wall in the back—this I will never forget—was the word “YO,” in Spanish. I didn’t get it at all, but Pablo Suárez was in ecstasy. “This is genius,” he said. “There is something that is happening and it is not happening in the helmet, or on the shelves, or in that word, but here, in the middle.”

APR: In that whole relationship.

JM: And my experience on that trip can be boiled down to that, to understanding that what was happening was not happening in this or that object, but in the middle, in the “between.”

APR: In the invisible relationship that you constructed.

JM: I saw shows that were not an accumulation of independent objects, but where each individual object contributed to creating an atmosphere. And that had a great impact on me. When I came back, I worked a lot. In 92, I had a show at the Fundación Banco Patricios that included the work *Perspectiva* [Perspective]. That was going a step beyond the paintings of the interiors of churches, creating a spatial illusion by means of the thickness of ropes and weights.

APR: Going beyond the canvas to reach out into the space itself.

JM: Yes, that is a three-dimensional work. I also made some works with, for instance, a floor rag or another object next to a triptych. But my intention was for the atmosphere to be more important than the individual pieces.

APR: And were there other people doing that sort of work in Argentina at the time?

JM: What I was doing was not, as I recall, at all revolutionary, but it was revolutionary for me to do it. The show was widely criticized... maybe two or three pieces were good, but as a whole it was disastrous. (*Laughter.*)

APR: But from then on you never stop including space in your work.

JM: Or the idea that the work did not take shape in the objects themselves, but in the interrelationship between them. I think that in the next show, which was at the Casal de Catalunya, the objects were more honed; I was better able to remember the image of Marinus Boezem. The show had many fewer objects but they were much more thought out.

APR: That piece of tree trunk with the bandage was like something orthopedic, a part of the body; it was related to mutilation and pain. Like the leg. These are not happy pieces. What was going on with you in those years? Did you go into therapy? (*Laughter.*)

JM: I was actually enjoying myself a fair amount in those years. In 93, I got a fellowship from the French Embassy. The Grupo de la X no longer existed as such. My work had gone from being a fluid

activity as it had been when I ceaselessly made paintings and objects to a process that required more thought, sitting down and honing the piece.

APR: The first phase has to do with obsession. When you're obsessed with something, you go straight there almost without thinking about it. But then you have to edit all that. It's not a question of repeating, like with the piano, or of returning. It's a process of honing layer by layer, of research. I think that that's when you grow.

JM: Well, I did grow a lot in those years, even though I don't remember having produced all that much. I started going to Europe almost every year. In terms of my personal life, all I can say is that those works illustrate a lingering sense, a sort of undertone of a certain discomfort.

APR: You can sense that discomfort. Everything heads to the ground or is pinned down...

JM: Yes. There is always something like that in the works: they may flow at times but, in general, they're pretty jammed up and uncomfortable...

APR: What about your fellowship at La Cité?

JM: After that show in 93, I got a nine-month fellowship from the French Embassy to work at La Cité des Arts, so there I went. At a certain point, while there, I made a work that, for me, sums up my entire year in France. It was called *32 morceaux d'eau* [32 Pieces of Water] and I showed it at the Jorge Alyskewycz Gallery in Bastille in 1994. I had a room that looked out on the Seine and the river was part of my daily life. I noticed that at times the water got murky and, at others, there was a strong current that would rise and ebb. I watched how the river changed from my window. And so I made a piece where the river and its flow are turned into small solid forms with no connection to one another. A sort of analysis of the river.

APR: See what I mean? That idea of compartmentalization also runs through your work: you see how the river flows, but you dissect it.

JM: I used a liquid but very dense material to paint that series of gouaches where the shape of the river is determined by the banks and the bridges. When the works dried, there was still the mark of the liquid, of something in motion yet very dry and hard.

APR: That marked a major shift, an almost installation-like process in relation to painting in the space. Another thing that I see again and again in your work is the idea of the city. Images of maps, the cathedral, street signs, picking a painting up off the sidewalk and taking it somewhere... What I mean is, no matter how inward Macchi's world may seem, you have always been someone who observes his surroundings.

JM: That's right, my works would come to me while I was walking. I would see something that struck me and take that image to the studio.

APR: But the perspective in the river piece is from above, like a map.

JM: Yes, I think that was the first time I worked with a map, in fact, the forms are taken from a map of the city.

APR: Anyway, after your time there, did you come back to Buenos Aires?

JM: I did.. It was the Menem³ years and the country was a real mess. You could tell that they were stealing everything. And, besides, the art in fashion here at the time, which revolved around the Centro

³ Carlos Menem, president of Argentina from 1989 to 1999.—Trans.

Cultural Rojas directed by Gumier Maier, was pointless as far as I was concerned. I didn't feel remotely identified with any of that. There was a self-referentiality that I found unbearable. Like you were saying at the beginning, that's always there, but I think it should be worked through so that you can barely trace it. My work, of course, did not work in that context because, at that time, I was filing everything down, taking away any extra, and what was going on around me was just the opposite: a lot of detail and self-referentiality.

APR: We're talking about from 93 to 96?

JM: Yes. I went back to Europe and went through a difficult period, emotionally speaking. My partner and I were separating and I decided to settle in Rotterdam, where I had gotten a fellowship.

APR: Did you consciously decide to go to Rotterdam?

JM: No, an opportunity came up and I took it. I was in a deep crisis. I moved around a lot in those years, from that three-month residency in Rotterdam to Germany, and then to London for nine months. But those two months in Rotterdam were tough. I think they were the seed of everything I've produced since. I still go back to the things I made during those two months.

APR: The *Accidente en Rotterdam* [Accident in Rotterdam]. (*Laughter.*)

JM: Yes, *Accidente en Rotterdam*. In fact, at the end of the residency I had a show at the Duende Artist Initiative called *Extremely Recent Works*. One of the works included was *Accidente en Rotterdam*, another was *Vidas paralelas* [Parallel Lives], the piece of the two twin panes of broken glass. I also showed two works made with light and shadow, a back and forth that first appeared at that time and continues in my work, as does the question of chance.

APR: You went from the dreamlike or the surrealist to the absurd.

JM: The absurd or the grotesque. At the residency there was a mirror that was broken in a corner. I made a cardboard box with the same dimensions as the mirror, with the crack in the corner and all. It was called *Souvenir of a night I spent trying to forget you*.

APR: Something of a catharsis? Not because your problems appeared in the work, but I'm wondering if that emotional instability put you in a creative state.

JM: Yes, absolutely.

APR: Have you ever gone through anything like that again?

JM: No, I've been very careful not to. (*Laughter.*) I never again found myself in such a complicated situation. Perhaps because it was the first time, a sort of Big Bang, a first accident, right? Chance. But as soon as the Big Bang happens, a whole obsessive structure takes shape around it. In *Vidas paralelas*, for example, the process consisted of shattering a pane of glass, tracing that structure of lines, copying it onto a mirror, cutting the other pane of glass, and placing one next to the other. One could say that, at that point, chance has almost nothing to do with it.

APR: What year is that notebook you have there from?

JM: 96.

APR: It says: *Rotterdam, April 4, 96. At a certain hour on a sunny day, a form of light comes in that is unlikely to be repeated until the same hour next year. Four rectangles of light appear on the floor and walls. An accident happens at the intersection of the paths of darkness between the four rectangles. Two cars crash, causing the death of their occupants. Three minutes later, two days later, a while later or, perhaps, before, that collision could not have occurred, and that's how it's always been.*

Sometimes, standing in the middle of a street, I think that at another moment I would be being run over by the red car I saw drive quickly by two minutes ago. There is a sense of death. Perhaps the idea of the double in your work has to do with the phantasmagoric, with another you from another life. The shadow, the relationship to death.

JM: Well, that's the idea of the *Doppelgänger*.

APR: It seems that 96 was a very particular year in your career.

JM: It was. I did that residency at Duende thanks to a friend named Mirta Demare and, during that period, I produced most of the watercolors in the book *Block*. I didn't have a studio, money, or anything else. All I had was a table, pads of paper, and watercolors, and things that I by no means foresaw appeared. An image would come to me and I would put it down on the paper.

APR: You also produced the work with the musical score at that time, right?

JM: Yes, I planned it in Rotterdam, thinking it would be the first work I would make in England: the idea was to make a score with no notes, but where the lines were the music. To make the lines on the staff, I used strands of hair from a friend of mine in Rotterdam. The work was called *AB*, my friend's initials. When I arrived in London, I began buying the newspaper to find out what was going on in the world after my Dutch retreat and to practice my English. And I started clipping some news stories, mostly about accidents, out of the paper. At a certain point, I put together that group of newspaper clippings and the image of the empty staff. So I took the group of articles, cut them out, and then stuck them on a large sheet of paper in the same pattern as a sheet of music.

APR: You used the whole articles, the full stories, right?

JM: Yes, I would cut and paste the entire text of each story. I would leave a centimeter between stories. To my surprise, when I finished drawing the lines I realized that there were notes—the intervals between the texts of the articles acted like musical notes. To compose the piece, I established a correspondence between the distance between the space between words and the duration of the sounds. Then I copied it all in musical notation and tried to play it, but it was impossible. So I went to see a musician—who turned out to be the son of Blas Castagna—who lived in England. I visited him at the university where he worked, and with a computer we produced a five-minute piece for piano.

APR: Where did the title come from?

JM: As is often the case, when I started to try to come up with the title I looked in the dictionary and came upon "incidental music," which is the music that accompanies an action, that in some way suggests how you should look at a given image. I thought that that name was very precise because those newspaper articles involving anonymous people incited a kind of cushion for everyday life; nobody pays much attention to these news stories, but the fact that they exist creates a sort of background, the certainty that everything can come to an end at any moment, a sort of undertone or incidental music for daily life.

APR: Then you came back to Buenos Aires. I would like to hear what you have to say about the theatrical experimentation workshop.

JM: When I came back to Buenos Aires, I got involved in very simple theater projects and met theater people.

APR: What drew you to the theater?

JM: The possibility of creating in collaboration and the notion of fiction. It was at that time that I heard about the theatrical experimentation workshop and decided to apply.

APR: Who organized it?

JM: Fundación Antorchas. The coordinators were Rubén Szuchmacher and Edgardo Rudnitzky. The format was great: four visual artists, four theater directors, four writers, and four musicians were brought together. We would meet once a week for four or five hours to discuss our projects.

APR: That was when you started working with Edgardo, right?

JM: Soon after I started working with that group, I began working on productions because the theater directors began asking us, the artists in the group, to do sets. In 2000, Alejandro Tantanian was invited by the Teatro San Martín to produce a version of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, and he asked me to do the sets. He wanted a really oppressive atmosphere and for the whole play to take place in an interior. I took it a step further and suggested that the actors never leave the place where the story happens. I made a fairly realistic kitchen corner with table and wall, and I copied it four times.

Agustín Pérez Rubio: You did a number of sets, right? Where?

Jorge Macchi: That's right. At one point I worked on a play by Javier Daulte, Rafael Spregelburd, and Alejandro Tantanian called *La escala humana* [Human Scale] performed at Rojas. I also did the sets for a play by Edgardo Rudnitzky called *Cine quirúrgico* [Surgical Cinema]. The last project I did was a version of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Lucerne Theater.

APR: But that was much later.

JM: That was in 2006. Before, in 2003, Rudnitzky, Tantanian, and I had presented *Carlos W. Sáenz*—a work that the three of us put together on the basis of the idea of keeping the three languages (music, theater, and the visual arts) on the same level in a horizontal relationship—at the Brussels theater festival.

APR: You have had an important presence in the theater over the course of a number of years: 98, 99, and what you were saying about the second phase of the workshop, and then the plays. But your art also partakes of theater and performance. Do you think that the experience with the theater helped you in your installations? Because I see an installation in your sets for *Miss Julie*. Interestingly, that work is from 2000. It reminds me of works by other artists, like Monika Sosnowska, who have worked with that obsessive idea of spaces, of rooms, of opening doors and going from one place to another. I mean, your work on that set was interesting in its own right, as a work of art, even though it is little known.

JM: Very few people outside theater circles saw that work. There are very important connections between theater and the visual arts, but I think that the most significant thing I learned can be summed up in the idea of fiction. If, before, I did not value theater because it was artificial, I was later interested in it for that very reason. What I mean is, I learned that it is much more interesting to formulate something that is obviously artificial and that, nonetheless, incites sensations and emotions.

APR: And to provoke or perhaps to transform reality on the basis of that fiction, I mean, not just looking at fiction from reality as something that doesn't affect you, but even making reality change through awareness of that fiction. Where did you get the idea for *Buenos Aires Tour*?

JM: I think the first notes for that work date back to when I moved back to Buenos Aires, in 98. They went something like "make an alternative tour of Buenos Aires." Little by little, a tourist guidebook of Buenos Aires that was based on paths determined by shattering a pane of glass over the map of the city took shape. At a certain point, I decided I needed the help of others to give the guidebook textual and sound dimensions: María Negroni did the texts and Edgardo Rudnitzky did the sounds, while I collected the objects and took the photographs. We broke the glass on the map and then chose forty-

six “points of interest” on those lines. We also established some guidelines for the materials to be collected: they should not be illustrative and informative in relation to the place; there should be no relationship between the different materials; each material should be independent of the others; and, finally, all these choices should accentuate the ephemeral—that is, that the materials chosen be at the place as long as the wind does not blow them away. Which means that, as a guidebook, it was useless.

APR: I’m really interested in everything you have to say because, for me, *Buenos Aires Tour* is a critical work from a political standpoint—and I don’t think many have talked about this. The tourism industry has killed cities like Barcelona, for instance, and your guidebook is an alternative guidebook, a guidebook of the margin. Though much political art strikes me as propagandistic, I am interested in how processes of politicalization make themselves felt in a work, because politics is in the individual, it’s part of one’s self.

JM: There are two things in the *Tour* that surfaced in later analysis. The work may have ended up being political because of the time when it was made. One of the objects was a handwritten dictionary blurred by water. It was the first thing I found, and I came upon it in the Riachuelo at one end of the *Tour*. It was not until well after I had finished the *Tour* that I began to discover a close tie between dictionaries and guidebooks: both attempt to grasp the ungraspable. Both are approaches that end in nothing, because a language is not a sum of words and a city is not a sum of historical places and restaurants. At the same time, the need to make *Buenos Aires Tour* was, for me, connected to my intention to turn Buenos Aires into my home base, the need to understand why this was the place I had chosen. I think that is why I chose to work with two artists who were from Buenos Aires, who knew the city very well but who had also left Buenos Aires for periods. That was the way to avoid a tourist vision. It was a sort of self-portrait in three parts, a triple self-portrait.

APR: A shared experience of the city.

JM: That political question, a somewhat strange side of this *Buenos Aires Tour*, also makes itself felt because all of the materials are related to that particular period.

APR: When, in 2010, we showed that work at MUSAC, we put Hernán Marina’s *Buenos Aires by Night* right in front of it. It was really interesting because Hernán’s work is about the violent events that took place here in 2001, which reinforced the political reading. What did that time mean for you and how do you remember it?

JM: I think that *Buenos Aires Tour* reflects absolute incredulosity. The things that one considered well established came undone, evaporated, and all that was left were ruins, shards of something that had existed, or that one believed had existed, and then exploded.

APR: You were making maps in those years as well, right?

JM: I think I made the first of those cut-out maps in 2002. I was at a residency in Civitella Ranieri in Italy for a month and a half, and I started cutting out a map of Rome. That work was related to earlier works like *Monoblock*. The first version is from 1998. What I did was remove information about the dead from newspaper obituaries, leaving only the crosses and the stars of David. I would then hang the papers from a single point so they looked like a very delicate handkerchief. In later versions, I layered the obituary pages and formed the shapes of buildings.

APR: Very hopeful, Jorge. Because those *monoblock* works with the buildings and the little crosses work together as a combo: it is container as space of death as well as a double absence, because you can no longer identify the dead person. Like with the disappeared, who cannot be buried. That’s

exactly why that work takes my breath away: all that remains is structure and, in the end, we are all unknown.

JM: Not long ago, I remembered something that has to do with obituaries and with my own life. When, in 79, my dad died, it was near the end of the school year and I had been absent a fair amount. If I didn't show up even one more day, I would not be promoted. So the day after my father died, I went to school to ask them to please let me skip a day. It was madness. I went to talk to the homeroom coordinator, and the guy says, "OK, but when you come in tomorrow bring the obituary with you so that we can see you're telling the truth." I don't remember whether I actually took it in.

APR: I think that *Buenos Aires Tour* condenses many things.

JM: I agree, there are a lot of references to death in *Buenos Aires Tour* as well. But what has happened to maps? Before there were smartphones, maps were a way to begin to explore an unknown city. And what would happen if you cut out the city blocks? The city would come up against its negation. There are routes on which to circulate, but nowhere to go. That was, in a way, where the notebook called *Guía de la inmovilidad* [Guide to Immobility] got its name. What remained when the city blocks were removed was a sort of withered leaf, the nervation but without movement. Something similar happened with the paper. Paper is simply a support for information, but as you remove the information, attention is inevitably drawn to the paper itself, to its materiality. So the paper becomes fragile and begins to deform. And then, suddenly, when you put holes in it—and this has to do with Fontana—the paper becomes sculpture, it takes on three dimensions. That was the meaning behind those maps.

APR: Describe your approach to video. We have spoken of music, of theater, maps... When you made *La flecha de Zenón* [Zeno's Arrow] with David Oubiña, you hadn't yet made any other videos, right? What was the second one?

JM: For the second one, I started working with David as well. We made a first version and then, in 97, I returned to that work, which is called *Súper 8*. It shows that red line that goes by in Super 8 tails. The audio track is sound from horror movies. It's a very simple assemblage of that line and those sounds. I loved the process of making the third video: I would go out on the street and take photographs of words. Then I would go home and, like a serial killer, I would use the words I had photographed to start putting together a text addressed to an anonymous person. And if I was missing a word, I would go out to look for it. I was an urban hunter.

APR: That sounds like turning around your process, or the process proposed to others, in *Buenos Aires Tour*: it is not a question of what you find in the city, but of you having to find something specific. It's like a set of instructions for yourself, a creative imposition. What is the relationship to the image in the video?

JM: For something like reading, video has a sense of suspense that is, for me, fundamental; the fact that things are not shown at the same time but gradually and according to the intentions of the one who made it. Then, I think, came *Diario íntimo* [Intimate Diary], but I'm not sure.

APR: That's right, those two works are closely tied. People even get them mixed up.

JM: But for both the book we are making now [*Diario íntimo*] and the video, there is an editing process. I am the one who decides where each sentence goes. And I really enjoy doing that: taking something that is given, like those ridiculous headlines from interviews, and saying, "That's me."

APR: In the end, what you're doing is narrating, making other people's stories your own.

JM: That's right, and changing subjects is amazing. I find it both funny and not funny; it's like the diary of a schizophrenic.

APR: *Diario íntimo* is from 2006, by which time you were an international artist thanks to biennials.

JM: For me, 2004 was a very important year because I was in the São Paulo Biennial. In a very small dark room, I showed *Caja de música* [Music Box], a short video from 2003 that I recorded on the bridge that connects the Museo de Bellas Artes and the Universidad de Buenos Aires Law School.

APR: Which came first, the image or the idea?

JM: I think that when I was crossing that bridge one time I looked down and said to myself, "This could be the basis for a music box." I framed it, took a number of shots, and then chose one. The good thing about that avenue is that there were times when, because a traffic light had turned red, it was completely empty. I shot a group of cars that went under the bridge over the course of one minute. I wanted that group of cars to operate like the metal bumps on the cylinders in music boxes so that, when each car entered the top of the frame, it would produce a sound. The idea was that the sound made by each car be determined by the lines dividing the lanes—there were five lanes—so that it could be read like a sheet of music. Of course, the cars in the video go by again, I mean, they play the same tune again—which I found a bit hellish: cars that, completely unaware that I was shooting them from up on the bridge, happened to go by at a certain moment and so they find themselves trapped in a repeating hell.

APR: But that is very typical of your work, Jorge. In *Miss Julie*, the actors find themselves in the same place time and again.

JM: Yes, that's true. My God! (*Laughter.*)

APR: That idea of ending up in the same place or thinking that you have escaped even though you haven't. I mean, there is a given structure, and I think that is always there. Consider, for instance, the staff, which is a structure.

JM: Yes, absolutely.

APR: The meridian, the parallel... These are imposed orders, structures of thought that you undermine and alter. The mathematical, the linguistic, the musical, writing, these are received structures of thought.

JM: They are structures, of course, and I need them. (*Laughter.*) That, for me, is the point of discomfort: they are annoying yet necessary, which is uncomfortable. I really liked the way you connected the music box and the set for *Miss Julie*. I hadn't thought of that.

APR: Let's go on. You were telling me about the 2004 São Paulo Biennial.

JM: The video was a modest piece, nothing spectacular, but it worked well. The next year, María de Corral invited me to the Venice Biennale and, at almost the same time, the Argentine government invited me to do the country's pavilion there.

APR: First came the invitation from María de Corral and then the project for the Argentine pavilion?

JM: Sergio Baur, who was the cultural attaché at the Foreign Office at the time, got in touch with me to tell me that they had selected me to make a work in a 17th-century chapel. Of course, there was no way I could do a traditional show in a place like that. So I began working intensively on the information I had about the building. I was struck by the fact that there was a depiction of the Ascension of the Virgin Mary on the ceiling. I associated the baroque shape of that ceiling fresco with

the shape of a trampoline. What came to me at that point was just a funny image: an acrobat jumping up towards a depiction of the Ascension. At that point, I started thinking about the sound the springs would make, which might be a sort of percussion. So I called Edgardo Rudnitzky, who quickly grasped the project and he proposed including a viola. It was not an innocent choice: the viola is an instrument from the same period as the building and it is even depicted in the fresco. The work took on a musical dimension that established a very powerful relationship with the building, the chapel—a place to sing religious music. There was also a dialogue between the object and the representation, between the illusion and the presence of the object in the real space.

APR: Like *Buenos Aires Tour*, *Still Song* is, in my view, another watershed, a great installation.

JM: Something that would later continue first appeared in that work, mainly, the idea that what we are seeing now is the result of a chance occurrence, of an accident that has later been frozen. There seems to be something like an accident-paralysis sequence. These are installations with two distinct times: what one supposes to have happened and what one is seeing. *Homesick Home*, for instance—the rug that is on exhibit in Bogotá now—is just that. The whole installation [*Gloria*, 2015] on the ground floor is that as well: a sort of ghost of something that happened some other time. The first case of that is, in my view, *Still Song*.

APR: It's also at play in *Hotel*.

JM: But I made *Hotel* a year later. I don't really remember how *Still Song* took shape; I remember that I had made a drawing of the rotating light of an ambulance siren. And a beat-up stretch of the wall. I mean, as if the light had smashed up the whole wall when it turned around, which is sort of what happened later in *Still Song* with the inversion of the light. The lights are supposed to rotate, but the situation here is perfectly motionless and still. The lighting is even and what is on the walls are black holes, not glimmers of reflection lights. The wall was pierced and what you see behind is just darkness. And the mirror ball gives a sense of the end of the party.

APR: It reminds me of the movie *Carrie*.

JM: That's an apt connection. I love that scene.

APR: It's one of my favorites. She is a loser. And, Jorge, indisputably that image of the loser—of someone who is the winner but, at the same time, continues to be a loser—runs through your work. That installation also makes reference to art history, to Fontana, but also to Argentine art history, to informalism, to Testa, Greco, Kemble, destructive art...

JM: Perhaps, but not consciously. What I thought about when making *Still Song* was the killer power of light when it settles and the inversion of light and shadow.

APR: In the 2000s, especially from 2006 to 2009, I see two major themes in your work: first, public space and, second, the return to painting. Regarding the first, *Piscina* [Pool] at Inhotim, *Preludio* [Prelude], the project you did for Bariloche, and *Marienbad* mean a change in scale. People now identify you with large-scale public space projects. What's the relationship between that and the more introspective Macchi?

JM: I've always liked to be given a guideline, a space with certain dimensions and limitations, like in Venice, where it was not possible to touch the walls. I like coming up with specific and unforeseen solutions for that delimited terrain. For the pool for Inhotim, Rodrigo Moura made a fairly open-ended proposal: he asked me to turn some of my drawings into a three-dimensional work. I couldn't figure out what to do until I came upon the pool. And I thought it might be interesting since the viewer would literally dive into the work.

APR: Before we spoke of the theater, where nothing is subordinate to anything else and every element is important. Is that also true when you construct a “stable” fiction in a site-specific work?

JM: When you work in theater, you’re always thinking that that space is going to be inhabited by actors. Even though you know people will participate in sculptures of that sort or in works for outdoor spaces, it’s not the same. The set for *Miss Julie* is, for me, not complete without the actors. I mean, it cannot survive on its own; in theater, you have to create situations that are not self-sufficient to allow other realms in. For *Inhotim*, I had to create a self-sufficient piece.

APR: That’s less true of other works, though, like the work with the paddleboats you and Edgardo made for the New Orleans Biennial [*Little Music*, 2008]. It struck me as a new twist on your *Caja de música* and *Balada* [Ballad]. There is a whole history behind that biennial, which started after the hurricane, right?

JM: Yes, Dan Cameron organized it in response to the destruction that had ravaged New Orleans and he proposed that the artists work on that theme. I called Edgardo and we started thinking together.

APR: When do you decide to work with Edgardo? What are the terms of that marriage? Do you decide you want to work with him because your idea already has a musical component?

JM: The need can arise for different reasons. Sometimes because the project has a musical dimension and requires things I don’t know how to handle. In those cases, Edgardo is the perfect person because with him I work comfortably not only on musical, but also on visual and spatial features of the project. I have complete trust in him when it comes to developing a work. Besides, we have a lot of fun working together. We took the New Orleans project very seriously. A tragedy had taken place there and the easiest thing to do is put salt in the wound, but that sucks on an ethical level. We wanted to make a work that would look to the future. People were going to keep living in that city. Edgardo had found an article that said that, after Katrina, the musicians had left the city. So the aim was to bring music back to the city. We started by looking for things specific to New Orleans: the African influence, jazz, the water... and we learned that these paddleboats, which had been very popular, had disappeared entirely after Katrina. At the intersection of all these vectors, we came upon this instrument, the kalimba, which is played with thumbs. Its name means “little music,” which ended up being the title of the installation as well. We made large kalimbas that were played by the boats’ paddles when they rotated. Edgardo and I thought hard about what they would play. It had to be a very simple melody because there were four or six paddles per boat and we could use six or seven times. So we decided to work with the pentatonic scale, which is the scale that jazz got from African music, and with very simple melodies. There were later proposals to produce the work in other places, but we didn’t want to. We thought that, in another situation, the work would be decorative. So we decided never to make it again.

APR: The second thing that strikes me during this period is your return to painting. You have said, quite aptly, that you never gave up painting—and this show and catalogue attest to that—but that, for many years, you did not engage it directly. I would like to know when and why it returned, what had to happen for that to take place.

JM: I think it was basically out of a physical need. Over the course of all these years we’ve been talking about, I would sometimes try to paint, but then put it aside...

APR: Would you try to paint because you had an image in mind or because you needed to pick up a paintbrush? Many painters have told me, “I just need to do it,” out of a question of craft. The act of mixing paints, of painting...

JM: Pleasure, nothing more. And the question of pleasure is somewhat tricky, because I needed a justification for it. I wanted to throw myself into the canvas, physically, bodily, but, when I would look at what I had made, I found it meaningless. From 2000 to 2010, I tried to paint on a number of occasions, but I would always put it aside.

APR: And what happened in your life to make way for that change? The birth of your son?

JM: I find it a little unseemly to talk about the birth of my son, but if you take a look at the dates, the connection seems obvious.

APR: It does. I see parts of your life—your personal traumas, your frustrations with artists, even your sessions with your psychoanalyst and your phobias—in your work. I think you have used them a great deal, often with a sense of humor. But there are also things that, in my view, elude you, and I would say that they are also related to Macchi, if not explicitly. What about painting?

JM: I have a possible interpretation, though it's by no means a sure thing. In 2010, a few months after my son was born, I called the painter Juan Becú and asked him to come over to talk about painting and how I could start painting again, but in a way closely tied to painting by him I had seen at the Alberto Sendrós Gallery in 2009, these amazing paintings of flowers...

APR: I spoke earlier of time in your work, of that frozen time. Your own time—the time of Jorge Macchi, his activities, shows, biennials—is another question. The birth of a child changes the nature of time.

JM: It was a big change for me because I took being a father very seriously. I stopped taking long trips.

APR: Exactly, and it's not like you were a young father. You decided to have a child and you made time for it. I think that you see things differently from there.

JM: You can come up with many theories, though I wouldn't say that was the reason. That change of pace is, of course, tied to painting, but I think there was something going on before that, something I associate with the classes I gave at the [Universidad Torcuato] Di Tella.

APR: Tell me about that.

JM: The work we did at the Di Tella in 2009 and early 2010, at exactly the same time my son, Vicente, was born, was very serious and intense. I formed part of the faculty at the Artists Program and a number of the participants were painters: Sofía Bohling and Tiziana Pierri, for instance, who were adamant defenders of painting. When I would listen to them, I totally got their pictorial problems—it's always hard to talk about painting—and, at the same time, I felt envious that they had those problems. That's why I say it wasn't only the birth of my son, that there was something else operating on another level. And, at the same time, I was worn out.

APR: Had Macchi turned into something that came before you, that came before your person, something that generated certain expectations?

JM: I wanted to make something that would not be readily identified as my work, it's true, but I also wanted to make a work that you would have to take in from one meter or five meters away. A work that it would be useless to photograph because it had to be experienced. At the same time, I began to feel the need to put my body in the work in a way I hadn't been; in the work I had been doing, I was able to delegate a lot of the more exacting work to another person. Out of that need, I started to become the one with absolute responsibility for each piece; I would start and finish it, do the whole thing myself. No one else was involved. I even stopped working with an assistant at my studio. And as

I started painting with oil on large canvases, engaging my body in the process and tiring myself out along the way, I stopped making watercolors. I don't know what to make of that, but I no longer felt the need to make them. Maybe, for me, the watercolors had been a way to counterbalance a more rational and mental activity. It was a more unconscious, carefree, and speedy place of expression. The other works were more mental and their production depended more on others. Those two facets coexisted. But, again, as I threw my body into painting, I no longer felt the need to make the watercolors. With some works, there is no need that I be the one to make them or that people establish a physical tie with them. And there are others that do require a physical, spatial connection with the viewer, for the viewer to be there, looking at it.

APR: That is the case with *Container*, I think. The image may be powerful, but you have to be there. It's a site-specific work bound to the architecture.

JM: I got all kinds of criticism, often from people who had seen the work on the Internet and said, "Duchamp did that way back in 1914." If you look at a photograph, you might think it's just a question of putting an object from the outdoors in a museum gallery, in which case it's a Duchamp, no two ways about it. Of course, Duchamp is in that work, but for me the experience of walking into that room and perceiving that object (it was impossible to photograph the work because you could never get a wide enough angle to see it all) and awkwardness was much more important. It is closer, in my view, to Richard Serra.

APR: It's a question of presence.

JM: That's what I mean when I say I'm worn out, fed up with everything, with the whole contemporary smartphone culture. I have the feeling we are losing something irretrievable, which is presence, the experience of things. And I don't mean I do not use technology...

APR: And do you really think that painting...?

JM: I don't know, I have no idea.

APR: Anyway, you start with yourself. You put your body into it, you are present. And, at the same time, I think that this turn in the path of your career is totally honest, bold yet true to yourself and, what's more, to art. Another artist would say, "I'll just stay here." Still, I think that this will be a period, that things will take another turn eventually. I may be wrong and, in twenty-five years' time I will interview you again and we'll talk about twenty-five years of painting by Macchi. But I would be surprised. I don't think you're going to give up other things.

JM: In fact, I had a show in Bogotá recently [*Lampo*, Nc-arte, Bogotá, September 2015], and it had nothing to do with any of this. I don't know where it will lead, and that's always a good thing. With the paintings, a new image always comes to me. I see something and not only do I think "I would love to photograph that" or "I would love to have that image," but also "How could that be approached in painting?" That's been happening to me a lot lately. It's strange, like the painter's inner dialogue: "How could I represent that? How could I turn it into material?"

JM: In closing, how do you imagine your work will evolve in the coming years?

APR: Hard to say anything about that. Best to answer with the celebrated words of former president [Eduardo] Duhalde: "I'll speak of the future later on."