

# Angela de la Cruz

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File Note #50 Angela de la Cruz *After*

Carolina Grau

# Angela de la Cruz

Angela de la Cruz has been experimenting with the language of painting for 20 years. She has attempted to redefine the terms and boundaries of the medium since she first began, focussing on painting both as an object, and in terms of what it can represent.

De la Cruz's works are rooted in the history of painting and are always made in the traditional way: her starting point is a rectilinear stretcher with canvas tautened over it, to which she applies acrylic or oil paint in horizontal brush strokes, making a 'perfect' monochrome surface. While still a student at the Slade in the mid 1990s, de la Cruz started breaking the supporting stretcher, in an attempt to find another dimension to the object. As soon as she broke the stretcher she realised that the boundary of the painting was no longer its containing edges, but that its placement in space redefined the work, both as an object and as representation, or a kind of image. She opened up another way of reading the work.

*Ashamed* (1995) was the first painting to use the surrounding space, both to contain the work and to dramatise the condition of painting. This small yellowish canvas is folded on itself, then wedged into a corner of the exhibition space. Brave though it was to present a painting in this way, it was braver still to stand a painting on the floor, as she did the following year with *Homeless* (1996). This large, urine-yellow painting whose stretcher is crudely broken, lurks in a corner of the room.

From then on her paintings began to suffer accidents (*Crash*), were amputated (*Severed Painting*), became angry (*Bully*) or slipped and fell (*Fallen on Your Own Butt*). All belonging to a series called *Everyday Paintings* [1995–1999], these painting-objects took on human frailties, both through their titles and in the positions they occupied in the gallery space: in the corner, on the floor, standing, hanging, resting or leaning against the wall.

De la Cruz then moved on to what she called "commodity paintings" in which she explored the concepts of seriality and repetition. She produced different series, including *Ready to Wear* [1997–2003], *Nothing*

*Ashamed* 1995 / Courtesy  
Private Collection, London / © the artist



*Homeless* 1996 / Courtesy  
Wilkinson Vintners, London / © the artist



*Deflated V* 2010 / Courtesy  
Private Collection / © the artist



[1998–2005], *Loose Fit* [1999–2009], *Deflated* [2009–ongoing] and *Hung* [2009–ongoing]. While the concept in each series remains constant, size and colour vary. ‘The common denominator of these paintings is that they each represent one another’, she has said, ‘the principle is that all the paintings are essentially the same painting’.

The clearest example of this is *Ready to Wear*, a term used in fashion for factory-made clothing in standard sizes. De la Cruz’s *Ready to Wear* came in three sizes: small, medium and large, in shiny monochromes of red, blue and white. These glossy paintings, each with the canvas half pulled from the frame, display themselves to the viewer as though half-dressed, teasing, sexy and stripping, revealing their hidden stretchers to the public. On the other hand the series *Nothing* are crumpled canvases placed anywhere on the floor, sometimes next to another painting, or even under a chair, forgotten. De la Cruz has described these as ‘paintings in waiting’, or that have already fulfilled their function. No matter how crumpled they are, you always know that at one point they belonged on the wall.

Following her exploration of space and the third dimension, de la Cruz started to work on the series *Still Life* [2000–2001], in which the paintings incorporated objects such as tables and chairs. These works are the first to address volume, mass and weight, qualities specific to sculpture and which would form a part of her work from that point on.

Recycling has also been a theme throughout her work, and she has often re-used stretchers and the canvases of old paintings in order to make new ones. The series *Clutter* [2003–2005] incorporates the leftovers of other paintings, gathering the odds and ends of old paintings and surfaces together in bags and boxes. *Clutter with Blanket* (2004) was initially inspired by a pile of leftovers from old paintings discarded in a corner of the studio, hidden under a plastic sheet. At the same time de la Cruz had been looking at news images of the Iraq war and of the bombings of 11 March 2004 at Atocha train station in Madrid during the morning rush hour. The subsequent paintings, she said, are based on ‘the idea of showing something dead or alive, covered in a blanket’.

The presence or absence of the body has always been central to de la Cruz’s work. ‘I considered the canvas as a parallel to the body,’ she has said. De la Cruz began using some of her own body measurements to provide the dimensions of a number of works. The *Clutter (Bags)* [2003–2009] all measure her own height of 1.53 metres. *Torso* (2004) is a box made to the exact measurements of her torso, containing old paintings.

In *Upright Piano* (2002), de la Cruz joined two pianos together, one on top of the other, its height determined so that a composer friend could play the piano while standing. De la Cruz used no paint at all in this work.

*Nothing* 1998 / Courtesy of  
the Artist and Lisson Gallery / © the artist



*T Piece* 2005 / Courtesy of  
the Artist and Lisson Gallery / © the artist



The pianos are containers of sound, the *Clutter (boxes)* [2003–2005] are containers of other paintings and *Clutter with Wardrobes* (2004) uses real wardrobes as containers. She began using wardrobes and filing cabinets when she realised that her own body fitted inside them, and she has described these as being like coffins. Wardrobes were piled one on top of the other or hung on the wall just from one screw, defying their weight and volume.

One day de la Cruz lost her balance, and during her recovery became highly conscious of her arms and legs and the fragility of her own body as she learned how to walk again. Soon after she made *T Piece* (2005), in which one wardrobe hung from a single screw, with a second wardrobe balanced precariously on top of the first, but which tried to look light and effortless. Another work of that period is *Hold No 1* (2005) a metal cabinet hanging from one screw and supporting a box made to her measurements. It is like a body supporting another body, carrying it.

Later de la Cruz was in hospital for a long time, after becoming paralysed. One of the first works she made during her recovery is *Flat* (2009), a chair collapsed on the floor as if it had been unable to support the weight of a body, and, with its legs outstretched, unable to stand again. In the current series *Deflated* a shiny unstretched painting hangs from a screw, as if it were a coat on a hook. Is the body absent or present, is it about to arrive or has it just departed? Where is the body? These questions are dramatised in *Deflated*, just as the plight of painting, the object and the body are dramatised throughout de la Cruz’s work.

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Ready to Wear XVI (Large / Red) 1999 /  
Courtesy Wilkinson Vintners, London / © the artist

**Angela de la Cruz** was born in 1965 in La Coruña, Spain. She moved to London in 1989 where she now lives and works. De la Cruz studied Fine Art at Goldsmiths College and completed an MA in Sculpture and Critical Theory at the Slade School of Art in 1996.

Her solo exhibitions include: 'Trabalho Work' at Culturgest, Porto, Portugal (2006); Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla, Spain (2005); Museo de Arte Contemporanea de Vigo, MARCO, Spain (2004). In 2004 she completed a residency at Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin, Ireland where her work was subsequently exhibited. Cruz has been included in numerous international group shows, including at Dundee Contemporary Arts, Scotland (2008); Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York (2007); Albright Knox Museum, Buffalo, USA (2005); South London Gallery, London (2004) and in Manifesta V, San Sebastian, Spain (2004). This is her first solo exhibition in a UK public gallery. Angela de la Cruz is represented by the Lisson Gallery in London.

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#### Reading List

- Walter Benjamin *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1939, published posthumously)
- Miguel de Cervantes *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha* (First published 1605 & 1615)
- John Cage *Silence: Lectures and Writings* Wesleyan University Press (1961)
- Pär Lagerkvist *The Dwarf Hill and Wang* (1944)
- Jacques Derrida *The Truth in Painting* University Of Chicago Press (1987)

#### Viewing List

- Luis Buñuel (Dir.) *El Angel Exterminador* [*The Exterminator Angel*] (1962)
- Werner Herzog (Dir.) *Fitzcarraldo* (1982)
- Federico Fellini (Dir.) *8½* (1963)
- Jacques Tati (Dir.) *Traffic* (1971)

#### Listening List

- Steve Reich *Drumming* DG Deutsche Grammophon (1970–71)
- Joy Division *Closer* Factory Records (1980)

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*Flat* 2009 / Courtesy of the Artist and Lisson Gallery / © the artist

‘One day, I took the crossbar out and the painting bent. From that moment on, I looked at the painting as an object’  
 —Angela de la Cruz



Cover: *Studio shot* / Courtesy of the Artist and Carolina Grau / © the artist