

Álvaro Urbano: TABLEAU VIVANT

Sep 19, 2024–Mar 24, 2025

SculptureCenter

44-19 Purves Street
Long Island City, NY 11101
+1 718 361 1750
sculpture-center.org

Álvaro Urbano has been engaged in conversation and collaboration with various entities across different times and places, including artists, writers, and architects; plants and animals; buildings, ruins, and other human and other-than-human beings. For his project at SculptureCenter, Urbano focuses on a potential ruin, or a ruin in progress—a public artwork by the American sculptor Scott Burton (1939–1989) that was rescued from destruction and now faces an uncertain future. The work was originally installed in the lobby of the Equitable Center building in midtown Manhattan in 1986 until it was dismantled in 2020, victim to a renovation.

Atrium Furnishment consisted of a semi-circular seating area made with verde larissa marble, a set of four pink onyx lamps, and a marble centerpiece that originally contained a water feature but later was repurposed as a planter. The circular settee was outlined by a section of planted podocarpus trees and a polished bronze circle delimited the area. The floor surrounding the configuration was also intermittently inlaid with square red granite tiles designed by Burton. The overall shape of the sculptural group was reminiscent of a clock marking 9 to 5, as a reminder of the behavioral structure ruling this corporate setting. *Atrium Furnishment* was one of many works for public or semi-public space that Burton—a sculptor, performance artist, and writer critical to New York scenes in the 1970s and '80s—realized throughout his life before he died of HIV-related illness in 1989. Though elements of related exterior works for Equitable Center remain in place, roughly half of his site-specific projects have been removed or modified since initially completed.

At SculptureCenter, Urbano will display roughly half of the original elements of Burton's *Atrium Furnishment*. Referencing the work's original orientation, Urbano's new disposition will radiate across SculptureCenter's ground floor space, altering the entire gallery and producing a topographic landscape. Burton's public art projects always appeared as chimeras that mixed aspects of sculpture and furniture. By re-segmenting and re-organizing the work's elements across a new site, Urbano directs attention towards Burton's chosen materials and other inner physical dynamics and histories embedded in the artwork. Together, the marble segments elevate and sketch a new terrain, just as fragments of bedrock emerge throughout areas of nearby Central Park.

To this end, Urbano's exhibition at SculptureCenter aims to build a speculative bridge in both time and space between the lobby of the Equitable Center and the landscape of The Ramble, a section of New York's Central Park near 73rd and 79th Streets. Both spaces are rich in codes of social interaction and operate as meeting points in flux between the private and public spheres. Urbano's interest in The Ramble originates from its 19th century design, which was intentionally left seemingly untamed, wild, and difficult to navigate.

This portion of woodland is known as an ideal spot for birdwatching; simultaneously throughout the early 20th century it has been a popular cruising spot among queer communities. In this area unscripted sexual encounters arise with the passing of the seasons and are framed by the changing landscape, defying the hegemonic use of urban space. These furtive areas of the park become a backdrop for togetherness and queer sensibilities, where identity and ecological concerns converge. Site and circumstance, as Burton highlighted through his work, are the main notions that incite Urbano to blur similar boundaries and develop new narratives.

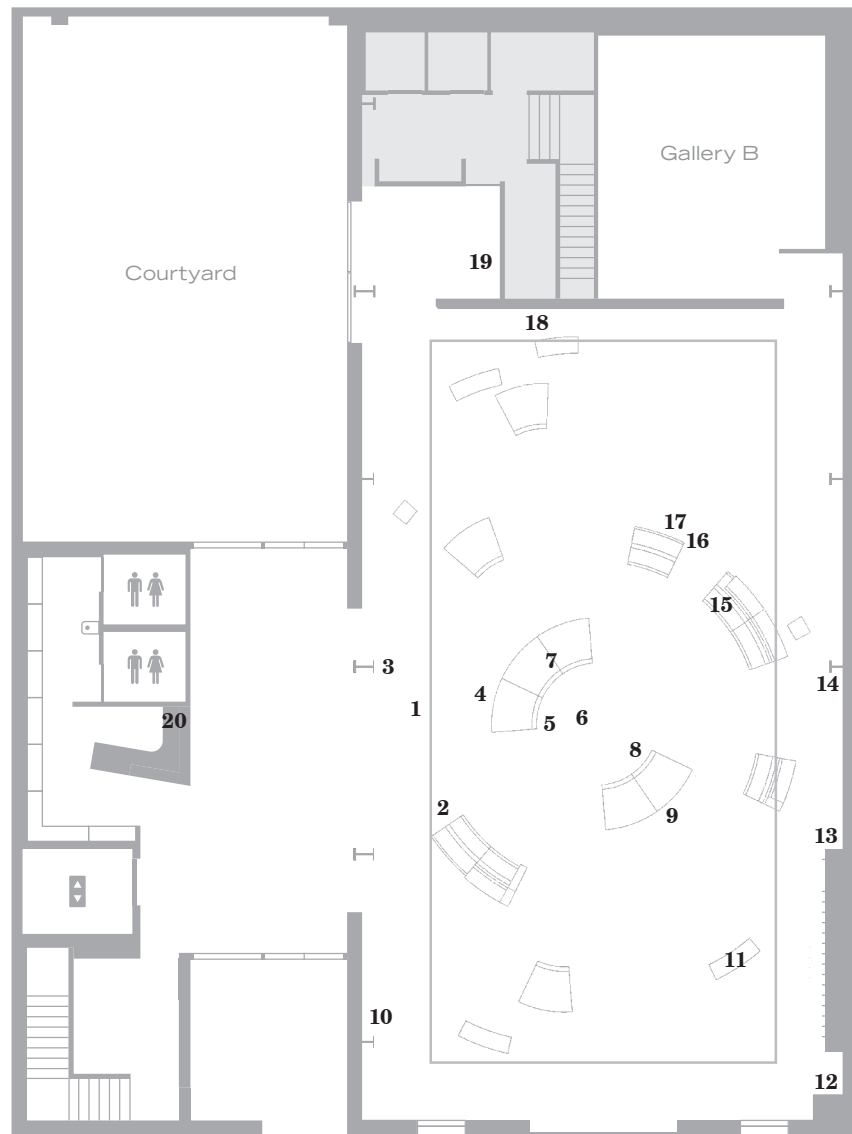
Botanical elements inhabit the installation—all uniquely rendered in painted metal—and reference the vegetation of The Ramble in Central Park during springtime. Magnolia branches, morning glories, and rhododendron bushes are frozen in bloom; jeffersonia plants sprout from the concrete floor. Half-eaten apples lie as if they were bitten just a few minutes ago and vines crawl up the building's architecture.

Urbano's (and Burton's) marble landscape is faced by a light installation supported by a drop ceiling that emulates the grid of the city along with disjointed glimpses of corporate interiors. The installation operates as a dreamlike plane, illuminating and animating the scenery below in a duet between light and marble that draws out interiority and desire from Burton's seemingly impersonal, disassembled work, at times referencing stage movements from Burton's performances in the 1970s. The passing of time is seen through this hanging platform, collecting dead leaves, puddles of rain, trash, and butterflies taking flight or stuck in tar, all visible in silhouette from below. These items and their shadowy images highlight a persistent tension that runs throughout the exhibition; the flourishing of the exhibition's landscape, growing among the marble volumes of Burton's original piece, is confronted by the oppressive overhead presence of the lowered ceiling and the oneiric freedom it conversely suggests. Likewise *Atrium Furnishment* has been taken apart and compacted into storage for an indefinite amount of time, while Urbano's exhibition speculates on and anticipates a future reassembly.

Given the lack of conditions to fully reassemble Burton's work in any new context, Urbano underlines the precarious status of works like *Atrium Furnishment* regardless of the fortitude of their material composition. While Burton's work will never be the same again, Urbano's exhibition asks what new beginnings this assembly of the austere matter of his art engenders, and how its monumentality and fragility might revive its latent ideas.

Álvaro Urbano is a Madrid-born and Berlin-based artist whose site-responsive practice involves an archeology of desires and past intentions. By creating atmospheres that replicate specific spaces and architectural gestures, the artist excavates the narratives that are embedded in these built bodies. Urbano borrows strategies from theater and filmmaking—such as lighting, sound and costumes—in order to create immersive environments that unfold in consecutive scenes or sequenced chapters. He uses different media to generate situations that approach liminal and dreamlike dimensions transforming the exhibition space into a vessel of phantasms and apparitions. Formally trained as an architect, one of the approaches that recurs in Urbano's practice is an affective response to the built environments. The exercise of re-creating and re-framing architecture (and twentieth-century architecture in particular) becomes an intimate exploration of the subjectivity of other artists and the social context in which these spaces were considered as functional, innovative, or condemned to oblivion.

Works in the Exhibition



Ground Floor Plan

Ground Floor

- 1 Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT, 2024
Metal, plexiglass, LED lights, leaves, wood, electrical circuit, motors, branches
60 x 30 x 2.8 feet (18.3 x 9.1 x 0.85 m)
- 2 Elements of Scott Burton, *Atrium Furnishment*, 1986
Semi-circular verde larissa marble bench, four onyx lights, inset brass floor element, circular verde larissa marble table with fountain (later a planter), semi-circular grove of conifer trees (later faux bamboo)
Original installation: 40 feet (diameter) overall
Commissioned by Equitable Life Assurance Society, New York
Installed at Equitable Center 1986; removed 2020
Private collection
- 3 Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Morning glory), 2024
Metal, paint
87 ½ x 45 ¾ x 21 ¾ inches (222 x 115 x 55 cm)
- 4 Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Jeffersonia), 2024
Metal, paint
41 ¼ x 18 ⅞ x 19 ¾ inches (105 x 48 x 50 cm)
- 5 Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Rhododendron), 2024
Metal, paint
69 ¼ x 29 ½ x 27 ⅝ inches (176 x 75 x 70 cm); installation dimensions variable
- 6 Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Rhododendron), 2024
Metal, paint
65 ⅝ x 25 ⅝ x 27 ⅝ inches (167 x 65 x 70 cm) and 44 ⅛ x 23 ⅝ x 19 ¾ inches (112 x 60 x 50 cm); installation dimensions variable
- 7 Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Jeffersonia), 2024
Metal, paint
35 ⅜ x 15 ¾ x 16 ½ inches (90 x 40 x 42 cm) and 29 ⅛ x 14 ¼ x 10 ⅛ inches (74 x 36 x 26 cm); installation dimensions variable
- 8 Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Jeffersonia), 2024
Metal, paint
35 ⅜ x 11 ¾ x 15 ¾ inches (90 x 30 x 40 cm) and 29 ⅞ x 11 ¾ x 11 ¾ inches (76 x 30 x 30 cm); installation dimensions variable
- 9 Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Rhododendron), 2024
Metal, paint
66 ⅛ x 37 ¾ x 31 ⅞ inches (168 x 96 x 81 cm); installation dimensions variable
- 10 Álvaro Urbano
He would always leave a window open, even at night, 2024
Metal, paint
700 elements; installation dimensions variable
- 11 Álvaro Urbano
51st and 7th, 2024
Concrete, metal, paint
Each apple approx. 2 ¾ inches (7 cm) diameter; installation dimensions variable
- 12 Álvaro Urbano
Veins, 2024
Metal, paint
111 ½ x 62 ¼ x 32 ⅜ inches (283 x 158 x 82 cm)
Collection of Antonio Murzi and Diana Morgan
Courtesy ChertLüdde, Berlin

- 13** Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Morning glory),
2024
Metal, paint
110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
(280 x 85 x 90 cm)
- 14** Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Morning glory),
2024
Metal, paint
122 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 46 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches
(312 x 118 x 90 cm)
- 15** Álvaro Urbano
City of Night, 2024
Metal, paint
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
(4 x 21 x 14 cm)
- 16** Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Dogwood), 2024
Metal, paint
100 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 66 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 55 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches
(255 x 170 x 140 cm); installation
dimensions variable
- 17** Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Dogwood), 2024
Metal, paint
68 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 49 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 34 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches
(175 x 125 x 88 cm); installation
dimensions variable
- 18** Álvaro Urbano
TABLEAU VIVANT (Magnolia), 2024
Metal, paint
78 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 85 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches
(200 x 130 x 218 cm); installation
dimensions variable
- 19** Álvaro Urbano
Zu verschenken, 2024
Metal, paint, stone
11 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches
(29 x 39 x 39 cm)
- 20** Álvaro Urbano
In Memoriam, 2024
Metal, paint, wood
Dimensions variable

Except where noted, all works courtesy
the artist, ChertLüdde, Berlin,
and Travesía Cuatro, Guadalajara,
Madrid, and Mexico City

Public Programs

Opening Reception
Wed, Sep 18, 2024, 6–8pm

Afterlives with Alvaro Urbano, Jess Wilcox, and Jeremy Johnston
Sat, Dec 7, 2024, 2–4pm

On View Concurrently

In Practice: Bastien Gachet
Sep 19–Oct 21, 2024

In Practice: Tony Chrenka
Oct 31–Dec 22, 2024

Álvaro Urbano Studio

Joel Mu, Studio Manager
Carlos Sfeir, Design and Production Manager
Juan Manuel de San Bruno Yakimovsky, Workshop Manager
Andrés González, Archive
Justus Albert, Wera Bet, Padyn Humble, Hannah Jones, Agnieszka Kucharska, Jerry McGettrick, Miguel Reyes, Art Assistants
Josep Ma Comas, Lighting design
Edmund Brown, Animation
Lazar Bozic, Animation
Rebekka Jochem, Coding
Francisco Martínez, Choreographer
Natalia Priwin, Lighting advisor

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Art Installers

Álvaro Urbano: TABLEAU VIVANT is curated by Sohrab Mohebbi, Director, and Kyle Dancewicz, Deputy Director, with Christopher Aque, Exhibition and Program Manager.

Scott Burton's *Atrium Furnishment* is presented in collaboration with Darling Green and the Equitable Art Collection. Special thanks to Soft Network.

Darling Green is a collaborative curatorial practice. The studio combines art collection and exhibition development with an open dialogue on the potentials of the exhibition form, privileging process over predetermined frameworks.

Soft Network empowers contemporary artists and those working with artist estates and archives to imagine and implement new and sustainable legacy models. Soft Network's mission is to provide space for shared dialogue around this critical yet overlooked field and to redress exclusions in art history.

Sponsors

Generous support for *Álvaro Urbano: TABLEAU VIVANT* is provided by Collection Silvia Fiorucci, Monaco; Elisa Nuyten; Will Palley; Eleanor Cayre; and the Isabel and Agustín Coppel Collection.

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