

## !Angel Orensanz! !No Wall Art!

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# !Angel Orensanz! !No Wall Art!

John K. GRANDE

Angel Orensanz's event-oriented art defies classification. His art cannot be reduced to a material or object-based essence. Angel is true to his own person. When he approaches a site, it becomes a scenario, a place where human culture (as personified by the artist) and nature, which for Orensanz is very much a living, three-dimensional tableau, interact. The focus is on the temporal and the ephemeral art scenario. Landscape as site is an experiential theatre, where each detail the artist integrates, changes the way we see our place in all this, or in the vista that a landscape can be, or the cityscape site, if that is the place for the art.

When a particular performance, sculptural situation, or environmental intervention takes place, Angel instigates it all as if art could never be walled in, or hermetically sealed in the flat white track-lit cube that Brian O'Dougherty defined so integrally for future artists in a 1976 issue of *Artforum* (another arts canon that later became a dogma!) Not many artists are so conscious that art exists within a historical and global continuum as Angel Orensanz. This field or terrain is one where Angel Orensanz explores his own history through the performance interaction with environment. His art events are like postcards to infinity. His art has no walls. The artist is a catalyst who instigates a response, and the effect remains as a memory of self, and other, and the place at a particular moment in time. As Pierre Restany once commented on Orensanz's artistic approach, "It's a question of play, certainly, but (...) it could well be that this same play is the very essence of the world."<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1984, near Saragossa airport, or in 1985 in Ejea de los Caballeros (both sites in Spain) with Angel directing the scenario from the air, recording the motions and linear furrow drawn along the earth spatially, the ever evolving Furrow Sculpture project came into being. As sculpting events the Furrow events are envisioned as scenarios in flux, as performances, even if the look is land art-ish. Angel Orensanz's Furrow Sculpture

projects are proto-agrarian and performative. Orensanz is not one of those environmental artists who believe in some quiet, well designed and sensitive integration of art into a landscape, or cityscape, or scape. He is truly expressive, part of a lineage of Spanish artists that include Picasso, Joan Miro, and the architect Antoni Gaudi y Cornet. Angel Orensanz comes from a region of northern Spain that is not central to the flow of cultural discourse, and not far from the mediaeval pilgrimage route that led to Santiago de Compostela in the Pyrenees, close to France. His art reflects an eclectic devil-may-care approach that is a natural evolution out of, and from, the culture of his childhood. Art is seen as something that raises the human spirit, draw us up, maybe to the heavens.

What is initially used as a frame of reference in Orensanz's metal and concrete sculpture, breaks open, and redefines the initial cues it develops. Some of these works are like line drawings or sketches in three-dimensional space as with the red linear material; effects created by a waterfall at the Monasterio de Piedra in Aragon in 1988. The lines curve and carve their way through space, gradually ascending, moving outwards from a centre. The extensions of these sculptures are like cosmic signs. Their potential symbols have parallels with Juan Miro's plastic sculptures or Picasso's ceramics for they do have a fabulist and universally accessible imaginative character. They ascend or move outwards horizontally from a central point. These sculptures are environments that express and exist in a place with a totality that is transitional, yet has an ephemeral character. The symbolic still plays a role with Angel Orensanz's art. *The Harvest Sculpture* (1996) of red metal in Bearn, France brings harvest machinery to mind. *River Aragon* (1978) in Saragossa, Spain carries an emphatic and Baroque sublimity in its presence. The cut out steel forms are expansive, celebratory and hopeful. They recall something of the Spanish exuberance of Antonio Gaudi y Cornet's surreal *Sagrada Familia*, and Casa Vicens. The same can be said for *Wall Sculpture* (1982)

and the vertical pillar-like *Lighthouse* (1974) of concrete and steel in Saragossa, Spain. Swirling around and circling the archaic concrete are bands of steel that have a hypnotic, suggestive sweep. The *Banderillas del Guadalquivir* (1992) made of steel and wood, precisely because the materials used in the construction are rudimentary projects a dreamtime sense that is imaginative and childlike. The character of this sculpture recalls Joan Miro's comment: "The forms expressed by an individual who is a part of society must reveal the movement of a soul trying to escape the reality of the present, to offer other men the possibility of rising above the

present. In order to discover a livable world—how much rottenness must be swept away!"<sup>2</sup>

The vertical steel tubes Orensanz has exhibited at Holland Park in London England and on the banks of the River Obro in Saragossa, Spain in the 1970s, were echoed in a later installation at Studio 54 in New York (1985). More recently Orensanz has exhibited his tube-like forms in Montreal, Canada. The vertical thrust of this colourful collectivity of forms suggests a spiritual dimension. One of the most striking and powerful sculptures Angel Orensanz ever made are the *Wind Sails* made of aluminum and painted with enamel for Molerers de

Angel ORENSANZ,  
*Spirit of Valley-Sallent de Gallego* (Spain), 1982.  
Concrete & steel. (15 ft x 1.6 ft). Photo: Courtesy of the artist.







Dei in Spain (1974). The same can be said of *Spirit of Valley 1* (1982) constructed of pre-cast concrete and steel in Sallent de Gallego in Spain. Sited on a tall cylindrical pedestal in a mountain valley this formidable sculpture recalls Max Ernst's outdoor sculptures. It has a primitive, surreal energy and looks like a transmitter for some lost Gods, for a mythological civilization and its motifs. These sculptures mark a high point in Orensanz's vernacular sculptural style. Like another piece, *Sun Screen* (1987) made on Sea Island in the southern U.S., these works are conceived as ephemeral accentuated architectural details that alter the surrounding environmental space, leaving colourful traces in space.

While we can perceive Angel Orensanz's performance installations as objects independent of their environment or as elements directed towards other elements, with which they are correlated — architecture, space, and the viewer — they also merge perceptually with the environment as we see them. A dialogue with space, and environment repositions Orensanz's artistic production, so that we realize this dialogue embraces ancient, modern, contemporary art

simultaneously. Orensanz is a universalist who sees no basic dichotomy between the various periods and disciplines, practices and approaches to art. He has never segregated his art from the physical world, nor from nature's processes. Instead Orensanz intuitively recognizes that art is more than an idea made manifest. Art can embody greater primal forces while keeping a very human, vernacular, even comical sense of the event that is the art aktion. ←

The author of *Balance: Art and Nature* (Black Rose Books, 1994 & 2004), *Intertwining: Landscape, Technology, Issues, Artists* (Black Rose Books, 1998), *John GRANDE's Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* was published by State University of New York Press in 2004 (HYPERLINK "<http://www.sunypress.edu>" [www.sunypress.edu](http://www.sunypress.edu)) and in a Spanish edition by the Fundacion Manrique in 2005. John Grande's *Dialogues in Diversity: Art from Marginal to Mainstream* was published by Pari Publishing (Italy) in North America in November 2007 (HYPERLINK "<http://www.paripublishing.com/>" [www.paripublishing.com](http://www.paripublishing.com/)).

#### NOTES

1. Pierre Restany cited in *Angel Orensanz: Wind Tides Sculpture*, New York, 2007, p. 126.
2. Joan Miro, statement in *Cahiers d'art*, Paris, April-May 1939.



Angel ORENSANZ,  
*Lighthouse-Saragasse*  
(Spain), 1974. Concrete  
with metal. Section size:  
(14 ft x 2 ft) Photo:  
Courtesy of the artist.

←←  
Angel ORENSANZ,  
*Green-yellow field*  
(Saragasse, Spain), 1987.  
Photo: Courtesy  
of the artist.



Angel ORENSANZ,  
*The Harvest Sculpture*  
(Béarn, France), 1996.  
Photo: Courtesy of the  
artist.

←  
Angel ORENSANZ,  
*Bandenillas del*  
*Guadalquivir-Sevilla*  
(Spain), 1992. Steel &  
iron (painted). Size: vari-  
able. Photo: Courtesy of  
the artist.