

PRESS RELEASE

METROPOLIS

An Urban Perspective of Galician Art

XOSÉ MANUEL CASTRO. *The Philosopher's Stone*



6 July – 14 October 2018

MARCO, exhibition rooms on the first floor

Hours: Tuesday to Saturday (including bank holidays) from 11am to 2:30pm and from 5pm to 9pm / Sunday, from 11am to 2:30pm

Produced by: MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

Curated by: Rubén Martínez Alonso

INTRODUCTION

METROPOLIS. An Urban Perspective of Galician Art

The 'METROPOLIS. An urban perspective of Galician art' series, which has been commissioned by Rubén Martínez Alonso, was created for a dual purpose: to travel back in time, to the Vigo of the twenties, to the point in history when *Metropolis*, the film directed by Fritz Lang, was released in the city; while also offering an insight into the current Galician artistic panorama. The project is comprised of a series of individual exhibitions, all of which provide a vision of the present, and there is a common element in each of the displays which recalls the past

The project comprises two clearly differentiated areas, both with regards to staging and to contents, laid out within the spaces of the first floor: on the one hand, the area corresponding to the past, consisting of a room where, as a reference or homage to the movie *Metropolis*, the spirit of Vigo during the 1920s is relived through vanguard architecture plans and images together with photographs and documents of that time, as well as art déco furniture, objects, clothing and decorations; and, on the other hand, the first individual exhibition of this cycle that is shown in the front rooms.

With regard to the historical element, the pieces exhibited come from the municipal archives – photographs by Jaime Pacheco from the Pacheco Photographic Archive; plans and blueprints of 1930s and 40s buildings and documentation from Antonio Palacios' urban planning, preserved in the Municipal Archive of the City Council of Vigo – as well as, to a large extent, from private collections particulares, especially the ISADORA Art Déco gallery, the establishment that loaned most of the pieces on display in this style.

XOSÉ MANUEL CASTRO. *The Philosopher's Stone*

XOSÉ MANUEL CASTRO is the protagonist of the first individual exhibition of this cycle. *The Philosopher's Stone* comprises over seventy sculptures made using different formats and materials, most of them from the artist's collection, together with a wood work created specifically for this project and with photographs documenting the creative process.

More INFO can be found at <http://www.marcovigo.com/en/actuais>

TEXT BY THE CURATOR

Vigo, a city that in the early 20th century, also dreamt about being a metropolis

“On the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the first showing of the film, *Metropolis*, by Fritz Lang, in the former Odeón cinema, we take a look back at what was certainly a turning point in Vigo’s history, a moment in which the past, present and future came together in this perfect and elegant harmony, known as *art deco*. A style which somehow managed to seamlessly combine classic and ultramodern design.

Metropolis – German expressionist science-fiction film – seemed to be the mirror our city wished to see itself reflected in. As perhaps the 1930s was when Vigo was closest to becoming a real cinema metropolis. In October 1930, the famous architect Antonio Palacios received a very special commission from the City Council: To draw up an urban plan: “Plan for extension and reformation of the inner city of Vigo”, which would be delivered two years later and received definitive municipal approval in January 1934.

In turn, just as *art nouveau* was going out of style, the *Art deco* style (the abbreviation of *arts décoratifs*) was beginning to emerge, with one coinciding with the autumn and the other with the spring of 1910. However, it wasn’t until the “roaring twenties” that this artistic movement really reached its peak.

In 1925, Paris opened the historic *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, exhibiting the best creations of designers of the stature of Ruhlmann, Lalique or Rateau, synonymous with luxury and sophistication. However, two decades before, *Le Figaro* had published on the front page of their Saturday edition (February 20th, 1909), one of the most iconoclastic texts in the history of art: the Manifesto of Futurism. The author of these words was none other than the Italian poet and publisher Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Manifesto laid the foundations of one of the most controversial historical avant-garde movements. A rebelliousness that spoke of ‘demolishing’ museums and libraries, of ‘combating’ moralism and “all opportunistic and utilitarian cowardice”, to end with a praise of the hectic modern city.

However, in reality, progress is not incompatible with respect for heritage, something that the city of the olive tree, unfortunately, was to learn too late. And it is precisely in a building like this, the home of MARCO de Vigo, where our discourse acquires its true meaning. Because the old Palace of Justice on Príncipe street did not succumb, as did others, to the devastating real estate speculation of the latter part of the 20th century. Converted into Contemporary Art Museum of the city, its walls are housing recent creations, in different artistic disciplines, of the contemporary Galician artists.”

Rubén Martínez Alonso
Exhibition curator

TEXT BY THE CURATOR

XOSÉ MANUEL CASTRO. *The Philosopher's Stone*

“Stone is no longer the medium through which the figure materialises. Stone is now the figure. Human, animal or vegetable forms will not be recognised in his most iconic work, because it is the stones themselves, with all of their mineral morphology, which prevail. Nonetheless, Castro’s artistic creation appears to go one step further, moving closer to a sort of “neo-alchemy”, in which he does not attempt to make gold from lead, but instead aspires to a new dimension of lifelessness. An absence of life that appears to be more of a state of deep sleep, the result of some sort of curse, or perhaps an unknown hibernation process.

Nature offers its inner raw product, an unborn element which the sculptor must essentially breathe life into. This refers neither to an anthropomorphic life, nor to a zoomorphic life, as while stones must remain stones, they must also depict emotions, a tear sliding down its epidermal surface, opening up through the clean cut of a scalpel. And, as in the work of the most prestigious plastic surgeon, it must all seem very natural following this aesthetic operation, as if it was nature itself that was the true maker of this work of art.

Alchemy, as practised in ancient Mesopotamia, Pharaonic Egypt, or by the Persian Empire before the Greeks and Romans developed their respective civilisations and placed down roots within our classical traditions, has always filled this particular space reserved for protoscience. Alchemy was constructed on philosophical foundations, and combined, in what was a *totum revolutum*, an almost mythical metallurgy, bringing together a variety of disciplines including astrology, medicine, physics, chemistry, art and mysticism to name but a few. And within this inscrutable alchemic universe, this philosopher’s stone, was, for many centuries, its most sought after goal.

A legendary substance, which it was said could transmute lead into gold. But aside from its incredible and magical feats, this philosopher’s stone was a true elixir of eternal youth, and the source of immortality. And for this very reason, this cumbersome and convoluted procedure was known as *Opus magnum*, or the Great Work.

But does art not share its eternal aspiration with alchemy? Does art not have the same aspirations as alchemy, to transmute the raw materials it finds within, adding a certain elegance, fineness, delicacy and life to this vulgar fruit which sprouts from the roots of the Earth? And the artist as a plastic alchemist, does it not yearn for this very immortality that only his *Opus magnum* can yield?”

Rubén Martínez Alonso
Exhibition curator

GENERAL INFORMATION

About the curator

Rubén Martínez Alonso (Vigo, 1980) holds a degree in History of Art from USC University of Santiago de Compostela. He later completed his doctorate program in Language, Science and Anthropology at UDC University of Corunna. The beginning of his doctoral thesis *As sociedades recreativas na Galicia urbana (1850-1936)* [Recreational Societies in Urban Galicia] coincides in time with his teaching lessons in the Faculty of Geography and History at USC. He currently teaches Geography and History at “Fin do Camiño” High School in Fisterra. His first steps in the world of literature led him to write poetry commissioned by *DORNA* magazine of Galician Poetic Expression during the first decade of the century. His primal novel *1980 (ano cero)* was published in 2011 and right afterwards *A saudade do caracol* [The Snail’s Melancholy] in 2012. With *As escaleiras do Gran Hotel* [The Grand Hotel Stairs] he is awarded the XIV Edition of the Risco Award in Literary Creation in 2013. In the field of research, several studies came to light: *Imaginería línea de la iglesia parroquial de Ntra. Sra. del Carmen de Ferrol* [Ligneous Imagery at Nuestra Señora del Carmen Parish Church in Ferrol] and *El Casino de Vigo. Crónica ilustrada de la histórica sociedad de recreo (1847-1936)* [Vigo Social Club. Illustrated Chronicle of the Historic Leisure Society], in 2006 and 2013 respectively. In the world of art, Martínez has collaborated in various exhibitions of paintings, such as *Paisaxes* [Landscapes] (Casa de Galicia, Madrid, 2009); *Paisagens da Galiza* [Galician Landscapes] (Casa da Cultura - Casa Barbot, Vila Nova de Gaia, Porto, 2010); *El bosque de favilas* [Forest of Embers] (Afundación, Vigo, 2011); *Post industrial* (Marcos Valcárcel Cultural Centre, Ourense, 2012); *Naturezas* [Still Lifes] (Maritime Authority of Pontevedra, 2012); *Mostrarte* (City Hall, City of Vigo, 2012); *Xosé Luis Otero* (European Parliament, Brussels, 2013); *Ephemeral. The intensity of the ephemeral* (AXA, Porto, 2014); *Atmosferas* (Vicente Risco Foundation, Allariz, Ourense, 2015), among others.

About the artist

Xosé Manuel Castro (Ponteceso, A Coruña, 1959) was trained in the Escola de Canteiros in Pontevedra from 1980 to 1985. Some of the exhibitions he has participated in are: VII Bienal de Arte. Nuevos Valores (Pontevedra, 1983); *Imaxes dos oitenta* (Museo do Pobo Galego, Santiago de Compostela, 1984); VIII Bienal de Arte (Pontevedra, 1985); V Bienal Nacional de Arte Ciudad de Oviedo (1986); *Antropoloxía e memoria. Visión actual da arte galega* (Fundación Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, 1987); *Dimensións atlánticas. Esculturas na rúa* (UIMP, A Coruña, 1988); I Mostra Unión Fenosa (A Coruña, 1989); *Arte galega: revisión dunha década. 1978-1988* (Auditorium of Galicia, Santiago de Compostela, 1990); II Mostra Unión Fenosa (A Coruña, 1991); *Pintores y Escultores Gallegos en la Expo 92* (Sevilla, 1992); *Mar de Fondo. Trinta artistas por Galicia* (San Martiño Pinario, Santiago de Compostela, 1995); *Galicia. Terra Única* (Santiago de Compostela/Lugo, 1997); *Xeixos vivos* (Galería Arabesque, A Coruña, 2007); *Materia esencial* (El Correo Gallego, Santiago de Compostela, 2008); *Tres en raia* (Galería Metro, Santiago de Compostela, 2009); *En el alma pétrea* (Galería Monty4, A Coruña, 2011); *Gallaecia Pétrea* (Museo de Galicia, Cidade da Cultura, Santiago de Compostela, 2012); *Piedra, papel, tijera* (Galería La Catedral, Lugo, 2013); *Lignolitos* (Galería Monty4, A Coruña, 2014); II Certamen de escultura Francisco Asorey (Cambados, Pontevedra, 2015); *Pedras vivas* (La Catedral Gallery, Lugo, 2017)

<https://josemanuelcastroescultor.wordpress.com/>

INFORMATION AND GUIDED TOURS

Our museum staff is available to help the visitors regarding any question or information about the exhibition, as well as during regular guided tours:

Every day at 6pm

Personalized visits for groups available, for bookings please call: +34 986 113900/11

Communication/Press Office Contacts

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