

## EXHIBITION

### WILFREDO PRIETO

#### *Left / Right*

8 April – 5 June 2011

## ENTERING THE WORK, 2



#### **DATES**

8 April – 5 June 2011

#### **VENUE**

Exhibition rooms on the first floor

#### **VISITING HOURS**

Tuesdays to Saturdays  
(including bank holidays)  
from 11am to 9pm  
Sundays, from 11am to 3pm

#### **CURATED BY**

Agar Ledo Arias e Iñaki  
Martínez Antelo

#### **PRODUCED BY**

MARCO, Museo de Arte  
Contemporánea de Vigo

Wilfredo Prieto. *Left/Right*, 2011  
Photo: MARCO/Enrique Touriño

## PRESENTATION

Wilfredo Prieto's is the second project of a cycle of exhibitions, titled, titled '**ENTERING THE WORK**', which will run for several months in the galleries of the first floor and whose title is borrowed from the celebrated piece by Giovanni Anselmo, *Entrare nell'opera* (1971). The paradox that surrounds the concept of spectator and which situates the latter somewhere between passivity and action is the departure point of this series of projects, which analyses the public, the visitor, the viewer, and the audience as an integral part of the work.

## EXHIBITED WORKS

Wilfredo Prieto was born in Sancti-Spíritus, Cuba, in 1978. Prieto's work reveals a critical position resulting from the discrete modification of everyday objects. These subtle interventions, which resort most of the times to everyday objects, lacking in aura, result in an image in which the artistic gesture becomes almost invisible. Even though the artist doesn't aim at entertaining the viewer, humour often becomes an important part of his practice, not as a goal in itself, but rather as the result of his critical distance or the unconventional relation established with the topics or media he chooses to approach.

## SYNTHESIS OF THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

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### 'Entering the Work'

'Entering the Work' is a cycle of exhibitions which will run for several months in the first-floor galleries of the MARCO. The title is taken from Giovanni Anselmo's celebrated piece, *Entrare nell'opera* (1971), a photographic emulsion on canvas, in which the artist photographs himself crossing a hillside in an action we interpret as revelatory of the relationship between the artist and his work and between space and time. The artist alters his role to generate a situation of integration, causing the spectator to react also, who, while without actually physically entering the work, nevertheless participates in it as a witness of the rupture of the limits traditionally dividing subject and object. The piece's ultimate meaning, therefore, resides in the viewer's reaction.

The fundamental role of the viewer in the creation of the artwork has informed discussions and essays in recent decades. Throughout the 20th century there arose a number of concepts a propos the open work, the emancipated spectator and the death of the author, and the role of the public, by virtue of either its physical presence or its need to involve itself actively, became essential for an artwork to become considered complete. The artist ceased to be the pivot of the process and, as Douglas Crimp has noted, the coordinates of perception were defined not just by the encounter of spectator and work but also by the space they occupied. To what extent does the public actually need to be before an artwork? Does not the simple fact of looking count for something?

The paradox surrounding the concept of spectator and which situates the latter somewhere between passivity and action is the departure point of this series of projects, which analyses the condition of the public as an integral part of the artwork. The direct relationship between the two, that is, their physical exchange and immediate reciprocity, generates a new dimension in which time and space alter the conditions of reception and perception.

The cycle 'Entering the Work' started with Loreto Martínez Troncoso, and continues now with Wilfredo Prieto, followed by proposals by Rubén Grilo (Lugo, Spain, 1981), Karmelo Bermejo (Malaga, Spain, 1979), Judi Werthein (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1967), and Amaya González Reyes (Sanxenxo, Pontevedra, Spain, 1979).

### Wilfredo Prieto

WILFREDO PRIETO (Sancti-Spíritus, Cuba, 1978) creates his works from everyday materials and objects, which he alters only minimally while nonetheless investing them with new meanings in the exhibition context. Humour and the absurd merge with Duchampian decontextualisation as strategies that allow him to build an ambiguous discourse – thanks to simplicity of form and complexity of meaning – the starting point of which is the spectator. This endows the pieces with new readings while overcoming minimalist self-referentialism and opening them up to multiple interpretations.

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Conceptual in character and minimal, though narrative, in form, Wilfredo Prieto's 'interventions' come across as visual poems, the fruit of the maximum reduction of the primary idea and of an interplay of scales and basic minimalist concepts such as 'place' and 'presence'.

The title of his intervention at MARCO, **Left / Right**, refers to the two-sided symmetry of the space of the first floor, including two side galleries equal in shape and disposition. Wilfredo Prieto settles a connection with one of the best-known paradoxes in Philosophy. According to Jean Buridan, a 14th century French scholastic philosopher, when faced with two desirable options we choose the better, but when these are the same, the will delays choice to analyse the consequences.

Buridan's satirists, basing themselves on the 'inaction' that supposedly arises when reason is equated with will, conceived, in their defence of the free will and in their reflections on the limits of the freedom of choice, a paradox about a hungry donkey which, after encountering two equidistant and equal piles of food, perishes because he is unable to choose between one or the other. The assertion, known as 'Buridan's donkey', refers back to a paragraph of Aristotle's *De Caelo*: "the man who, though exceedingly hungry and thirsty, and both equally, yet being equidistant from food and drink, is bound to stay where he is [...]".

The formalisation of Buridan's reflections, or rather, the *reductio ad absurdum* of his theories, is the basis for the intervention Wilfredo Prieto has created specifically for the MARCO's space. The symmetry of the first-floor galleries determines the sense of the visit and puts the spectator in the dilemma of having to choose how to proceed, whether to the left or the right, to find the two identical 'sculptures' that the artist has made using everyday materials and minimal craftsmanship in a way that is reminiscent of *arte povera* and revelatory of the conceptual subtlety that defines Wilfredo Prieto's work.

## CURATORIAL TEXT

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"*Apolítico* is the title of one of Wilfredo Prieto's earliest works, which he presented at the 8th Biennial of Havana (2003) and has since become the artist's most exhibited and acclaimed work. It is a 'sculpture' of huge impact which he made out of an object as ordinary and symbolic as a flag, and subjected only to the slightest of interventions. Comprising a series of masts and squares of cloth waving in the wind inside a Spanish military complex — the site of the biennial — it caught people's attention because of the flags' anaemic, washed-out appearance which was a result of their having been stripped of all their colour and reduced to tones of grey and finally converted into neutral, ambiguous objects.

Despite the visual simplicity of the installation, *Apolítico* is one of Wilfredo Prieto's more complex works in terms of its fabrication, because of the industrial processes the flags are subjected to in order to obtain the 'bleached' effect. The opposite happens in another early piece, a performance called *Paseo* (2000), in which he took an ornamental plant on an 'excursion' in a wheelbarrow around the Caribbean island of Curaçao. The action of liberating the plant from its enclosure can be understood as a transposition of a similar sensation the artist experienced when he first left Cuba, although any political reading drawn from Prieto's work is not so much because the artist deliberately seeks this but rather because of the connotations associated with some of the elements and materials employed in his pieces which, particularly in earlier work, come from his native Cuba, such as chícharos [peas] or the 'official' daily newspaper *Granma*. 'Although I do try to make a purely poetical work, there is always a political undercurrent', the artist confesses in allusion to Francis Alÿs, one of the most constant influences in his work.

As can be deduced from the two pieces just mentioned which, while formally quite distinct, are both susceptible to readings of a political or absurd bias, Wilfredo Prieto's work oscillates between the grandiose and the minimal, between the realm of the unachievable (for example, converting a football stadium into a pond where ducks paddle about freely, or building a motorway twisted in the manner of a Möbius strip on which cars go round and round without getting anywhere other than back to their departure point) and that of the unnoticed in any context other than the artistic, so unobtrusive are they. He has carried out actions and works involving heavy machinery, such the crane that lifts itself up (*Sin título (Grúa)*, 2006), and the helicopter attached to a table leg and flying stationary over the Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo in Móstoles, Madrid, (*Amarrado a la pata de la mesa*, 2011), while some of his most hard-hitting pieces use the heart of a watermelon (*Políticamente correcto*, 2009), puddles of rum and Coca-Cola (*Cuba libre*, 2010), and two superimposed Euro coins (*Eclipse*, 2010).

In 2008 Wilfredo Prieto covered the floor of the Annet Gelink Gallery in Amsterdam with hundreds of pieces of chewed gum arranged evenly in a square (*Smart Gum (Chicle inteligente)*, 2008). As with the other materials he appropriates for the realisation of his work (peas, bananas, soap, eggs, coffee, water, excrement, straw, clothes), the pieces of gum remain mostly intact, being barely altered by the artist's hand; it is only their usual meaning they are stripped of. He strategically uses a combination of humour and the absurd and Duchampian decontextualisation to construct an ambiguous discourse – by

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dint of formal simplicity and complexity of meaning – the starting point of which is the spectator who ‘does half the work’, as Duchamp would say.

Wilfredo Prieto understands the spectator to be an intrinsic element of the work, just as its title or any other communicative element is. He confesses that, while he has no particular interest in knowing or interpreting the public’s reactions to his work, their behaviour and conclusions add new readings to each piece and open them to multiple interpretations.

Echoes of Gabriel Orozco, for example in the interpellation of the spectator or the choice of materials and titles, and of Francis Alÿs in the opening up of meanings are a feature of Prieto’s work. Conceptual in character and minimal in form, although ironic and narrative too, his ‘interventions’ overcome minimalist self-referentialism – the temptation to allude to themselves – and instead carry profuse references to our immediate, social and political context. The red carpet he laid in one exhibition (*Sin título. Alfombra roja*, 2007) contains a reference to power. It is a ready-made which functions as a mere objet trouvé until we realise that it has something that transcends the symbolic, a modification, and this is the rubble left deliberately under the red fabric. The rubble functions as an anti-symbol or a contradictory element, a counterpoint which we also find in pieces such as *Uno* (2008): a heap of 28 million false diamonds among which there is one real one. The artist’s intervention characteristically consists of a minimal and at times imperceptible gesture such as this, which is revealed to us in the title or in the description of the materials used. They are ‘experimental acts’, as he himself defines them, the fruit of the freedom with which he approaches work, eschewing categories and definitions.

### Left / Right

The two-sided symmetry of the exhibition space functions as the starting point of Wilfredo Prieto’s intervention, created specifically for the MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo. The two galleries, situated on the first floor, determine the sense of the visit and put the spectator in the dilemma of having to choose in which direction to proceed, whether to the left or to the right.

If we decide to go left, we will proceed down a corridor that leads to a monumental sculpture, a rectangular parallelepiped, a simple geometrical shape executed on a large scale from a model made by the artist. And if we proceed to the right, we come to a sculpture measuring the exact same dimensions in a space identical to that opposite.

To work ‘with a space’ rather than ‘in a space’ is what defines all site-specific art, which generates its meaning from the relationship it establishes between work and site. This is a piece which responds to the architecture of the place, as well as to some of the assumptions characterising the return to form on which 1960s minimalist art rested. Formal simplicity and monumentality, coupled with the industrially-produced modules that shape the pieces, would place us before a minimalist cuboid were it not for the povera nature of the constructional element: barley straw. The allusions that Donald Judd was rejecting when he said ‘no illusions, no allusions’, are evoked in the material Wilfredo Prieto uses, in their odour, their texture, their places of origin and in their narrativity which are all so relevant in his work.

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The intervention points us to one of the most commonly cited paradoxes in Philosophy. According to Jean Buridan, a 14th century French scholastic philosopher who maintained that freedom is not necessarily based on rational principles, when we find ourselves before two desirable alternatives we choose the better, and when they are equally desirable, the will delays this choice to analyse the consequences.

Buridan's satirists, in their defence of free will and their reflections on the limits of the freedom of choice, expounded on the 'inaction' that supposedly befalls us when we equate reason with will and created a paradox involving a starving donkey who, when faced with two equal and equidistant piles of food, perishes because he is unable to choose between one or the other. The reductio ad absurdum of the philosopher's theory, borrowed from Aristotle and popularised as 'Buridan's donkey', serves Wilfredo Prieto to create *Izquierda / Derecha* (Left / Right), reinterpreting the paradox and echoing the formula the art critic Gerardo Mosquera invented to sum up his work: net idea (+) simple work (=) maximum meaning.

[Extract of the curatorial text for the exhibition catalogue]

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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**Wilfredo Prieto** (Sancti-Spiritus, Cuba, 1978)

Wilfredo Prieto was born in Sancti-Spíritus, Cuba, in 1978. He lives and works in Havana, Cuba and Barcelona, Spain. He was graduated from the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), Havana, Cuba. He was part of group Galería DUPP (Desde una Pragmática Pedagógica [From Pedagogic Pragmatics]), awarded the UNESCO Prize for the Promotion of the Arts during the 8th Havana Biennial. He was artist in residence with Kadist Art Foundation in Paris and John Simon Guggenheim in Nueva York, among others, and in 2008 He was awarded with Premio F Buenos Aires and The Cartier Foundation Award in London. He is now preparing a large exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, and he has recently opened the exhibitions *Amarrado a la pata de la mesa* at CA2M, Móstoles, Madrid, and *Praxis*, at ARTIUM, Vitoria.

Wilfredo Prieto has been present in the last editions of the Havana Biennial, and in international events like the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, or São Paulo Biennale in 2010. some of his solo shows include *Negro, Mate, Seco*, NoguerasBlanchard, Barcelona, Spain (2010); *Mountain*, SMAK, Ghent, Belgium (2008); *Dead angle (Lost Bills)*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, France (2006); *Mute*, McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, Canada (2006); *Mucho ruido y pocas nueces II*, MUSAC, León, Spain (2005). His work was featured in several group shows, namely *Lisson presents 4*, Lisson Gallery, London, UK (2009); *Stowaways*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, USA (2009); *That was then... this is now*, PS1 MoMA, New York, USA (2008); *Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino, Italy (2008). Prieto also participated in Thesaloniki Biennial, I Singapore Biennial and, and Biennale Cuvée, Linz (2009).

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## Wilfredo Prieto

### Education

- 2003      Proffesor at Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana  
            Postgraduate in Performance, Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana, Cuba
- 1998-2002      Galería DUPP (Desde Una Pragmática Pedagógica, artists' collectives), Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana, Cuba.  
            Directed by Rene Francisco Rodríguez
- 1992-1996      Escuela Profesional de Artes Plásticas, Trinidad, Cuba

### Solo exhibitions

- 2012      MOCAD, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, EEUU (coming soon)
- 2011      *Wilfredo Prieto. Left / Right (Entering the Work, 2)*, MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo  
            *Wilfredo Prieto, Praxis*, ARTIUM, Vitoria  
            Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon  
            *Atado a la pata de la mesa*, Centro de Arte 2 de Mayo (CA2M), Móstoles, Madrid
- 2010      *Negro, mate, seco*, NoguerasBlanchard, Barcelona
- 2009      *I am making Art*, Wilfredo Prieto & Ignacio Uriarte, Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto & Tokyo
- 2008      *Mountain*, SMAK, Ghent, Belgium  
            *Desnudo*, Galerie Martin Van Zomeren, Amsterdam
- 2007      *S/t (Alfombra roja)*, NoguerasBlanchard, Barcelona  
            *Sacando al perro y comiendo mierda*, Parque Lennon, Havana, Cuba  
            *A minute of silence*, Artists' Web Projects, Dia Art Foundation, New York
- 2006      *S/t (Grúa)*, Madrid Abierto, Madrid  
            *Grasa, jabón y plátano*, Convento de Santa Clara, Havana  
            *Mute*, MacMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, Canada  
            *Ángulo muerto*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris
- 2005      *Mucho ruido y pocas nueces II*, MUSAC, León
- 2004      *S/t (Biblioteca blanca)*, NoguerasBlanchard, Barcelona  
            *Speech*, Galerie Martin Van Zomeren, Amsterdam
- 2003      *Mucho ruido y pocas nueces*, Galería Habana, Havana
- 2002      *Wilfredo Prieto en el Wifredo Lam*, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana
- 2001      *Matrioska*, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana
- 2000      *Matrioska*, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana
- 2000      *Pie de obra*, (with James Bonachea), Centro Cultural ICAIC; Fundación Ludwig de Cuba, Havana
- 1999      *Conceptualismo Aditivo*, (with James Bonachea), Galería Oscar F. M. Sancti-Spiritus, Cuba



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## Group exhibitions (selection)

- 2010 29<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial  
*Beyond Entropy*, 12<sup>a</sup> Venice Biennial of Architecture  
*Panamericana*, Kurimanzutto, Mexico City  
*Future Generation Art Prize*, Pinchuk Art Center, Kiev, Ukraine  
*I'm Not Here. An Exhibition Without Francis Alÿs*, De Appel Boys' School, Amsterdam  
*Antes de todo*, CA2M, Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Móstoles, Madrid  
*Cosas que sólo un artista puede hacer*, MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo
- 2009 *Stowaways*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, USA  
*Lisson presents 4*, Lisson Gallery, London  
10<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennial
- 2008 *Objects of Value*, Miami Art Museum, Miami  
*Fuck You Human*, Maribel López, Berlin  
*That was Then... This is Now*, PS1 MoMA, New York  
*The Disobedients*, Annet Gelink, Amsterdam  
*Greenwashing environment: peril, promise and perplexity*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino
- 2007 *Territorios*, 52<sup>a</sup> Venice Biennial. Italian-Latinoamerican Pavilion  
*Extraordinary Rendition*. Nogueras Blanchard, Barcelona  
*Errore di sistema-System error*, Palazzo delle Papesse, Siena
- 2006 Singapore Biennial
- 2005 *The Hours*. Visual Arts from Contemporary Latin America, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
- 2004 *Cordially invited*, (episode 3, *Who if not we should at least try to imagine the future of all this?*) 7 episodes on (ex)changing Europe, BAK, Utrecht
- 2003 8<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennial, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wilfredo Lam
- 2002 Collateral exhibition to the 25<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial, Memorial de América Latina, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2000 7<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennial, DUPP
- 1999 *El Tiempo como Espacio*, Instituto Superior de Arte, La Habana
- 1998 I Festival de Performance Ana Mendieta, Unión Nacional de escritores y Artistas de Cuba, DUPP, Havana
- 1997 *En busca de una huella* (encuentro con la obra de Ana Mendieta), Cuevas de Jaruco, DUPP, Havana

## Collections

Collection Peter Norton Family, California  
Daros Collection of Latinamerican Art, Zurich  
FRAC Corse, France  
Verbund Collection, Wien  
Collection Museum of Old and New, Tasmania

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