

PRESS RELEASE

ALFREDO ALCAIN



Alfredo Alcain. *Palitos de colores sobre azul*, [Coloured Sticks on Blue], September 2017. Oil on canvas, 130 x 162 cm

28 January – 28 August 2022

First floor exhibition spaces

Curated by: Miguel Fernández-Cid

Produced by: MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

PRESENTATION

The **Alfredo Alcain** (Madrid, 1936) exhibition at the MARCO brings together more than 80 pieces produced from 1965 to 2021, including paintings, drawings and sculptures. Rather than being a retrospective, the show endeavours to appreciate the artist's highly distinctive path, the incontrovertible route he has taken through the history of art in Spain, to great acclaim from both critics and artists of various generations –even the youngest– yet afforded less exposure by institutions than it deserves.

The exhibition displays a selection of his oeuvre reflecting different periods of work, from the 1960s to the present day, and arranges them in a circular layout arranged along the front rooms on the first floor, using the airiness and structure of the spaces to great advantage.

El chuletón[The Chop] (1978), in the archways in the entrance to the space, offers a taste of what is to come. It is flanked by a piece by Teresa Moro that reproduces the peephole on the artist's house-studio door, and serves as a connection between the two exhibitions. The visit starts with three paintings which serve to highlight some of the hallmarks of Alcain's oeuvre, such as his personal sense of humour –candid, sarcastic and biting– and his use of popular iconography and composition systems built from the greatly contrasting images he brings together in the painting: a kind of display window (the inside of a haberdashery or an ironmongers), a showcase for objects for which Alcain feels a strong emotional attachment.

Visitors are welcomed by *Autorretrato en el curso del tiempo* [Self-Portrait in the Course of Time], a piece brimming with autobiographical allusions, among them the funerary plaque marking his death on the day of his birth. On either side of this, *Autorretrato del 44* [Self-Portrait from 44], which presents a pop-styled student-like image of youths in Spain's post-war period and early days of Franco's regime; and *Lugar para descansar* [Resting Place], in which he reproduces the gravestone of a person who died on the same day he was born.

Accordingly, alongside the idea of the passage of time and the constant element of humour –related to that of his friend José Luis Cuerda– the exhibition kicks off with that declaration of intent and with that thoroughly contemporary interplay of the self and the other, which he had already proposed in the 1960s. Alcain, a wonderful conversationalist, and author of rarely released texts about other artists, is also an avid reader and is extremely well-informed about the current artistic and cinematographic scene.

The large front rooms have been separated into two, well-distinguished spaces: on the one hand, his variations on still-lives –Cézannian, Pop, Morandian, painted and built in three dimensions– and the display pieces on Vasar paper. The aim is to show Alcain's working method over time; the way he returns time and time again to his subjects, always attuning them to the present moment, and his endeavour to be “alone and in a group”, combining small pieces by artist friends into his own. The large space, on the other hand, features his paintings of the last twenty years, as well as small-size bronze and wooden sculptures (still-lives and architectures) highlighting the craftsmanship of Alcain's oeuvre, which he builds and adds brushstroke by brushstroke, object by object, and his fondness for watching the work grow.

Other examples of his painting and works on paper can be found in the corridors and the other middle rooms –such as his *telephone drawings* located next to display cabinets containing documentary materials related to the exhibition– in a debate between 1960s Pop language, mainly the series of emblematic models of old Madrid (shop displays and façades, popular places and objects that are on the road to extinction), interconnecting and conveying his purpose, and his love for painting, noticeable in the numerous quotes and allusions.

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

The key to understanding the true uniqueness of Alfredo Alcain (Madrid 1936) is to remember that, as a painter, he came out of the Madrid set of figurative painters. However, he rapidly added his own distinctive features: subjecting the principles he regarded as most accepted to his sophisticated, subtle, exacting, self-critical and even corrosive humour. He is able, like few others, to stay on the borderline between tradition and modernity, because Alcain, uncommonly faithful to the genre of painting, is one of those artists who always pokes their head out and stops to analyse a novelty or a change of course in exhibition concepts, although sometimes he is guided by a certain –understandable– scepticism. Aware of his condition as a painter-painter, he is indomitable: in his life, in his work, he seeks no excuses nor does he propose half-hearted efforts, instead he makes everything revolve around painting.

Alcain works like an illusionist (what else is an artist really?): he paints slowly, before our very eyes he repeats manner and purpose, he doesn't have a card up his sleeve, or tricks; he reveals everything, unfolds it, beginning with his interests and devotions. And he does so quite naturally: opening new paths but justifying every artistic decision he makes.

A studio artist, whose quests are unaccompanied, subtle and shrewd in his discoveries, he seems content to stay on the sidelines, which allows him to work at his own pace, insistently and tenaciously, to produce an oeuvre which is quite often tiptoed around, as though we were afraid of not fully understanding its characteristics. Undoubtedly, because they are right in front of our eyes, but require being approached without visual complexes, involving an effort that might be less common than desired.

Miguel Fernández-Cid, curator of the exhibition



Alfredo Alcain. *Tríptico de la sandía* [Watermelon Triptych], July 1990. Oil and collage on wood, 59 x 169,5 cm

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alfredo Alcain (Madrid, 1936) studied Painting at the Escuela de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid (1953-58); Engraving and Lithography at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Gráficas, Madrid (1957-63) and Film Set Design at the Escuela Nacional de Cinematografía, Madrid (1961-64).

In 2003 he was awarded the National Prize for Fine Art, given by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture, in recognition of a career that, according to the artist, “began long ago, when I was 16 years old”. The panel reached its decision because of “his work as a painter who has skilfully reconciled geometry and lyricism, from the beginning of the 1980s until today, that confirms him as one of the most steadfast and singular voices in international abstract painting”.

In the 1960s and 1970s, his oeuvre was an x-ray of the times, perfectly reflecting the social situation. A child of the Pop Art era, his Spanish culture and tradition is profound, and in his career he has gone from a critical portrayal of Spanish stereotypes to international cubism, producing a remarkable body of work on the way. With early attachments to the world of film and theatre, his painting shifted between pop and critical realism, seeking not so much to reflect the consumer society (a feature of Pop Art) as to reflect the reality of Madrid city life.

“For the fifty years I’ve worked as a painter, many changes occur, which have never been abrupt, but, evidently, the way to paint gradually changes and in all that time there are many phases”, says Alcain. This continual progress has led him also to the art of sculpture, collages, compositions made from juxtaposed objects and to engraving, a discipline he devotes much of his time to lately.

Since the beginning of his career, his work has featured prominently in numerous solo and group shows, and it forms part of museum and private collections, such as Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville; Museo del Grabado, Buenos Aires; Museo Internacional Salvador Allende, Santiago de Chile; Museo Municipal de Madrid; Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid; Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, among others.

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Alfredo Alcain. *Autorretrato del 44* [Self-Portrait from 44], April 1990. Oil on wood, 112,5 x 150 x 4 cm

GENERAL INFORMATION / DOCUMENTATION / ACTIVITIES

Opening hours

Tuesday to Saturday (inc. holidays) from 11am to 2:30pm and from 5pm to 9pm
Sunday from 11am to 2:30pm

Documentation

The Library-Documentation Center at MARCO has prepared a **documentary dossier** which brings together links to articles and other information about the artist, which is available on the website www.marcovigo.com at [Library/News](#) and [Exhibitions/Present](#).

Learning activities

With the support of: Obra Social “la Caixa”

From the 15th of February, 2022

Hours: Tuesday to Friday from 11am to 1:30pm /

For booking please call +34 986 113900 Ext. 100/ +34 986 113908 / email comunicacion@marcovigo.com

Workshops for Children

With the support of: Obra Social “la Caixa”

From the 5th of February, 2022

Hours: Saturday from 11am to 12:30pm (de 3 a 6 años) and from 12:30pm to 2pm (de 7 a 12 años)

For booking please call. +34986 113900 Ext. 100/ +34986 113908 / email recepcion.marco@gmail.com

Information & guided tours

The exhibition staff is available for any questions or information, as well as regular guided tours:

Daily at 6pm

‘A la carte’ group tours, please call +34 986 113904 / 113900 to book

Interactive routes through the Vigo App

The new interactive route system through the ‘Vigo App’ allows visitors to access all kinds of content about the exhibition (videos, images, specific information about the works), either in the space itself through the beacons or bluetooth devices located in the exhibition rooms, or anywhere else, following the route from the mobile screen once the application has been downloaded , or from your computer through Concello de Vigo’ website.

Contact Press and Communications Department

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