

PRESS RELEASE

GLENDAL LEÓN

Music of forms



Glenda León. *Metamorfosis (serie II, n.1)*, 2018. Dos tapas de piano ensambladas formando una mariposa. 120 x 180 x 180 cm

18 June – 31 October 2021

1st floor B1 Gallery and Peripheral Gallery

Curated by: José Jiménez

Produced by: MEIAC, Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo / MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

OVERVIEW

After travelling to the MEIAC Badajoz, Spain, Glenda León arrives in Vigo with the exhibition *Music of forms*, which completes the MARCO's exhibitions program for this season. The project has been possible thanks to collaboration with the MEIAC, which was –just as the MARCO– a former prison. This fact is directly related with some of the works present in the show.

Glenda León (Havana, Cuba, 1976), who studied classical ballet, philology and art history in Havana, began to exhibit in 1999. This is what she herself pointed out in 2013, in an interview: “Music has been a source of inspiration for me since I was a child. That is why I wanted to be a choreographer for many years. Then I realised that the main component of the choreographic ideas of that era was the visual”. That is the core of this project and of Glenda León's work: the synthesis between sounds and the visual

Glenda León's proposal for the MARCO is articulated in two spaces that trace a tour through key works in the artist's career –installations, series of drawings, sculptures, photographs, work on paper, *in situ* installations– which span from 2008 till today. They combine different techniques and supports. The assembly and arrangement of the works have profited the special characteristics of the museum rooms, and they are displayed in subtle dialogue with those spaces. Hence, the oeuvres are adapted to the dimensions, layout and height of the galleries including a work specifically produced for this project, *Emotional Garden* (2011 2021), which draws a longitudinal line along the central podium at the first room.

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En palabras del comisario de la muestra, José Jiménez, “there is a dynamism that springs from the dialogue with *the forms of sound*, of music, which has been around since the time of the cultural invention of art, in Classical Greece. And it is also in this context where the relationship between musical sounds and the movements of the stars is first perceived, with what Pythagoras called “harmony of the cosmos” or “music of the spheres”. The music of the spheres brings us to the music of this world: from up above to down below, and from down below to up above. These are central issues that help us place the career and artistic work of Glenda León”.

TEXT BY THE CURATOR

The forms of sound

José Jiménez

What is the root, the starting point, for creating visual art works...? It is the process of *configuring forms*. Either statically or dynamically, and taking into account that the possibilities of dynamism have been intensely accentuated through new, electronic and later digital, means of representation.

But there is a dynamism that springs from the dialogue with *the forms of sound*, of music, which has been around since the time of the cultural invention of art, in Classical Greece, in a period that can be dated between the 8th and 5th century BC. And it is also in this context where the relationship between musical sounds and the movements of the stars is first perceived, with what Pythagoras called “harmony of the cosmos” or “music of the spheres”.

The music of the spheres brings us to the music of this world: from up above to down below, and from down below to up above. And this is something that is felt intensely in Cuba. Seeing and hearing the works of Glenda León always leads me to the literary work of Alejo Carpentier, who said about himself: “The music I have within me.” His musical training led him to write numerous texts on music, and it is important to note that, unlike European music, he characterised Latin American music by its intense *fusion*.

Music also flows directly in his novels, in his narrative texts. It is something that we can especially appreciate in his short novel *Concert Baroque*, written between Havana and Paris in 1974. It is a musical journey set in 1733, travelling from Coyoacán (Mexico) to Cuba, Spain, Venice (during Carnival) and Paris. The narration includes the meeting, in Venice, between Vivaldi, Scarlatti and Handel, where a long-lost Vivaldi opera is performed, and also describes how, in contrast to European Baroque music, the music of a black slave (Filomeno) emerges, taking us to Louis Armstrong’s trumpet. The text flows, at all times, with the movements of the words as if they were sounds, and with movement in time, through the journey.

These are central issues that help us place the career and artistic work of Glenda León, who studied classical ballet, philology and art history in Havana, and began to exhibit in 1999. This is what she herself pointed out in 2013, in an interview: “Music has been a source of inspiration for me since I was a child. That is why I wanted to be a choreographer for many years. Then I realised that the main component of the choreographic ideas of that era was the visual”.

That is the core: the synthesis between sounds and the visual. And, from this, both the visual and sonorous correspondence between the stars and the Earth where we humans live: a call to attention to the importance of nature, which is increasingly threatened. These themes are articulated in this exhibition of works by Glenda León: **Música de las formas (Music of forms)**, organised into three sections: I. Tierra y cielos (Earth and heavens), II. La espiral del tiempo (The spiral of time), and III. Ver la música (Seeing music).

A contemporary creator, Glenda León is fully a *multimedia artist*. She uses the most diverse media and expression techniques: objects, sculptures, installations, drawings, photographs, artist books and videos.

Now, in this wide array of expressive modalities there is a common thread that unifies her proposals: the articulation of her pieces flows through the musical registers with which the works are structured. In these works we can observe melodic imprints, or contrasts and variations, with which the visual forms acquire an inner sound, rhythm and projection.

What is a “form” ...? If we go back to the origins of our cultural tradition we have to refer to Plato, who elaborated the philosophical concept of form [εἶδος, eídos], going from what would be the aspect of something that we see to the substantive nucleus that gives unity to multiple dimensions.

In the specific field of music theory, Leonard B. Meyer (1956, 74) points out: “forms are essential aspects of style, alternative probability groups, each of which displays its own special probability relations within the overall stylistic context. And like the perception of the more generally constant aspects of style and the response to them, the understanding of form is learned, not innate.” He concludes: “The concept of form implies abstraction and generalisation”.

And on “the nature of the form” he indicates: “The understanding of a series of physically differentiated stimuli that make up a model or a form is the result of the human mind’s ability to relate, in an intelligible and meaningful way, the constituent parts of the stimulus or the series of stimuli to each other. For the impression of form to emerge, an order must be perceived in which individual stimuli are transformed into parts of a larger structure and perform distinguishable functions within that structure.” (Meyer, 1956, 169).

What Glenda León gives us in her works is a set of *open forms* that play with the correspondence between different ways of feeling and knowing: words, sounds, scores with drawings and visual registers, correspondence between heaven and earth, the passage of time... It is we, who are looking, who have to display a capacity for internalisation, to bring the plurality of formal registers to a specific area of significance. You have to go from simply looking to *seeing*, to perceiving the *unity of form*. Thus, the senses lead us to knowledge.

In Glenda León’s plastic forms, always in dialogue with sounds and texts, the features of another great Cuban writer also shine: José Lezama Lima (1980, 59), positioned as the nucleus of *poetic knowledge*: “Poetic knowledge is separated from dialectical knowledge, which only seeks to mirror its identity.” To know poetically is to see the reverse, the reverse of things. For Lezama (1981, 129), poetry is a transcendent dimension: “The essences expressed by the imaginary ages”, an articulation of “the impossible” over “the possible image”. But its itinerary is not simple, but rather labyrinthine. Its beginning is in the dissolution of the body itself to convert it into form: “Dissolve our body so that it becomes form.” (Lezama Lima, 1980, 68).

Eye and body venture like this in the image: “The eye creates the figure; the night expresses itself, falls on us by image. The eye feels a passive pride when it extends into the figure. Our body feels possessive pride when it penetrates the image of the night.” (Lezama Lima, 1980, 57). And poetic knowledge does not come freely, it is a difficult act of conquest. The poem is “a resistant space between the progression of the metaphor and the curfew of the image.” (Lezama Lima, 1981, 129).

The imaginary ages, the image as a secret channel of historical time, are only interviews in that double sphere of resistance in which bodies have to bear the nothingness that surrounds them and the products of culture: forms or figures, the retractable flow of images: “Just as the body supports the surrounding nothingness, the figures are forced to counteract the flow of images.” (Lezama Lima, 1980, 53).

Latin America, including Cuba, gives us the vision of difference, a result of the intense fusion that characterizes the best of human life. And in that context, Glenda León’s sound forms visually lead us to the deepest point of *poetic knowledge*: sky, flower, time, mirror, stars, clouds, political world, passing and forms of time, tears of transit, moments, power chair, music of the revolution, metamorphosis, consciousness and music of the spheres. The universe, here and in the heavens, as the *music of forms*.

Bibliographic references

- Alejo CARPENTIER (1974): *Concierto barroco*; Siglo XXI, México. 8th edition: Siglo XXI, Madrid, 1979.
José LEZAMA LIMA (1980): *La dignidad de la poesía*; Versal, Barcelona.
José LEZAMA LIMA (1981): *Imagen y posibilidad*; Editorial Letras Cubanas, Havana.
Leonard B. MEYER (1956): *Emotion and Meaning in Music*; University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Trans. Es. and foreword by José Luis Turina: *Emoción y significado en la música*; Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2001.

TEXT BY THE ARTIST

Time is a sound we don't hear

Glenda León

We coexist with an absence that we are not able to hear; a kind of longing for a state of full freedom, for a sense of belonging to the world. Art can act as a reminder of that state, of that intrinsic but long hidden power, of being in harmony with ourselves and with nature, as a kind of reminder to be more attentive in the world and see it as if it were seen for the first time, through the privileged gaze of a child. It is to make the imperceptible be perceived.

Like magic, art is an act of transformation, which sometimes translates into a simple match; showing relativity and the interconnection probabilities of things; ordering, with a little poetry, some fragment of the chaos to which we belong. It is a way of knowing the world; to understand and love the human essence.

This exhibition is being put together in times that will undoubtedly go down in history. The time of Coronavirus. Virtually every human in this world will have experienced what it is like to be confined. However, even after leaving confinement there are things that remain restricted in us: our senses. We live believing that we see, hear, smell, feel, but the truth is that we are doing so it at a level far below our capabilities. The way in which we have been educated, the way in which societies and city life itself are structured, curbs this great potential every second. In order to develop a true knowledge of the other, a true tolerance, and a true understanding of the danger that the Earth is in because of our actions, it is crucial to *feel*. It is from this feeling that we can truly know, and this knowledge is what leads to true freedom, it is what leads to coherent actions with the power of transformation.

It is not the same to be taught or to read about tolerance, about the danger of extinction of certain species, about animal abuse, as feeling the pain of a locked-up animal just by looking into its eyes. Reading about love is not the same as feeling it.

By breaking with reality, art has an important role in preparing us to be more open to change; a more flexible state of being is established, as the well-trodden paths of neural connections are altered. This happens when the viewer is *synchronised* with a natural element (in my case through the sound of breathing and representations of natural landscapes through different materials) or through the presentation of surreal objects, with combinations of never-before-seen elements.

In this process, silence and sound are like materials that I am constantly transforming. Sometimes I use sound to sculpt an image; at others, I use an image to draw the silence. I am interested in the latent content of sound (the imprint that it leaves in our brain, and in the body) carried by any sound instrument (or part of it), and how you can create an image from it.

Silence is a fundamental element on the path to full vision and listening. It is essential in the confusion of the senses. And when this happens, when blindness and deafness pass, then every element of existence can be *seen*. And we will experience how each step, each sound, each flutter of a butterfly's wings and each life occupies a crucial place in the world and gives rise to an endless number of effects. Each form is a form of time.

Then we will know that all that time that we have spent without feeling is time wasted. But recognizing this is the beginning of the journey. A journey that will lead us to the light of silence, from which we can listen to the music of the spheres.



Glenda León. *Dirigir las nubes*, 2008-2017. Video still (single-channel video, colour, sound, 1'00) and text

Addressing clouds

“According to a renowned scientist of quantum physics, there is evidence that, having achieved the degree of concentration and will needed, any individual can direct the clouds. The event occurred on different parts of the world but has seldom been seen, since nowadays almost no one looks carefully at the sky. However, many people have found quite accurate shapes in the clouds, but they remain ignoring its peculiar origin.”

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Glenda León is a Cuban-Spanish artist born in Havana in 1976. Her work has received awards such as The Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award and residencies such as the Couvent des Recollets, Paris and the Fonderie Darling, Montréal. Her work also forms part of important public collections such as those of Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Perez Art Museum Miami; Musée des Beaux Arts du Montréal; Art Gallery of Ontario-AGO, Toronto; Hammer Museum, Los Ángeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana.

She began her studies of Fine Art at the age of 12 and began to exhibit professionally in 1999. Before that, she studied Classical Ballet and Philology at the University of Havana, finally graduating in Art History. In 2007, she completed the Masters in New Media Art at the New Media Academy in Cologne.

She was part of the Cuban Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale with her work *Music of the Spheres* (2013). She has also been invited to the Havana Biennial, the SITE Santa Fe Biennial, the II Jafre Biennial, the Dakar DAK'ART 2018 Biennial, the Off Biennale Cairo: Something Else II and *Juntos Aparte 2018 - BienalSur, Cúcuta*.

Other group exhibitions she has taken part in took place in spaces such as the Museum of Modern Art - MoMA and the Brooklyn Museum, New York; CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco; Bronx Museum; Centre d'Art Contemporain Villa du Parc, Annemasse; Badischen Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; City Art Museum Ljubljana; The Mattress Factory, Pittsburg; Rhode Island School of Design - RISD Museum, Rhode Island; Nuit Blanche, Toronto, Canada; MART Museum, Rovereto, Italy; CIFO, Miami; Centre for Contemporary Art Laznia, Gdansk; Musée des Beaux - Arts de Montréal; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; and De Appel, Amsterdam.

She has presented her work individually at the Visual Arts Development Center-CDAV, Havana; Le Plateau Espace Expérimental, Paris; Château des Adhémar, Montélimar; Matadero Madrid; Atlantic Center of Modern Art - CAAM, Gran Canaria; and the Metropolitan Museum Manila, among other spaces.

Her work has been published in various magazines, catalogues and newspapers, such as *Bomb Magazine*, *Art Nexus*, *Artforum*, *Flash Art* and *Artcubano*.

<http://www.glenda-leon.com/>

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/Current](#).

Exhibition catalogue

With the occasion of Glenda Leon's solo show, the MARCO Foundation and the MEIAC have published a catalogue that includes texts by the artist and by the curator, José Jiménez, beside information and images of the works exhibited.

Learning activities

With the support of: Obra Social "la Caixa"

From 14 September, 2021

Hours: Tuesday to Friday from 11am to 1:30pm / For booking please call +34 986 113900 Ext. 100/ +34 986 113908

Summer Workshops for Children

With the support of: Obra Social "la Caixa"

From 29 June to 29 July, 2021

Hours: Tuesday to Friday from 12.00 to 2pm / For booking please call. +34986 113900 Ext. 100/ +34986 113908

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's website.

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