

PRESS RELEASE

FRANCISCO LEIRO

The Anthropomorphic, 1986-2022



Francisco Leiro. *Escorredoira II, Escorredoira III*, 2020. Polychrome pine wood, 218 x 140 x 180 cm / 213 x 117 x 210 cm.
Photo: Tono Arias

22 April – 16 October, 2022

Ground floor exhibition galleries

Curated by: Miguel Fernández-Cid

Produced by: MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

FOREWORD

This project, with which MARCO continues its line of self-produced exhibitions, proposes a review of the work over more than three decades of Francisco Leiro (Cambados, Pontevedra, 1957). The work in question has focused on the anthropomorphic, undoubtedly one of the mainstays of his production. Setting aside any chronological meaning or intention, the artist and curator seek to draw a relationship between the works and the peculiar spaces on the ground floor of MARCO, employing for this both previously executed works and new pieces produced specifically for this exhibition.

To begin with, the striking presence of the *Dama de Navalcarnero* [Lady of Navalcarnero] located in the panopticon, followed by Leiro's creatures that have taken over all the spaces on the ground floor. *Escorredoiras, Pavitas, Androias, Jaivotas, Homes de pau, Danzantes* and *Ceboliños* are ensconced in the rooms, installed in such a manner to allow visitors to discover the paths and multiple connections between the pieces and to enter into a dialogue with them.

Sculptures in granite, bronze and wood; models and collages converse with the monumental architecture of the courtyards, with the magical space of the panopticon, with the more traditional layout of the galleries and with the outer rooms, in such a way that visitors may perceive the varied interplay of scale and materials employed in one of the most personal sculpture styles of European art today.

This exhibition, which has taken much time and effort to produce and assemble, has been made possible thanks to the selection work carried out at the artist's studio and to the institutions and private collectors that loaned the artworks.

2



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

“Lo antropomórfico” [“The Anthropomorphic”] brings together a broad selection of sculptures – the least narrative ones – in which Francisco Leiro (Cambados, Pontevedra 1957) has endowed animals and things with human features and qualities.

While not a retrospective exhibition, it does include works executed from 1986 until now. For the last few decades, moreover, his exhibitions have provided an overview of his main themes and a showcase for his latest output. Leiro understands each of these occasions as a test, a challenge, in which his first consideration is how to fill the space. Walking through the rooms he visualizes which works to show and even the best way to do so, and from this first idea a sketch emerges of his proposal which he later discusses, but whose end result tends not to stray far from the original concept.

Leiro made a name for himself at the end of the 70s with figurative works categorized as surreal-like due to their freedom of form and iconography. However, it was in the 80s that he was afforded widespread recognition which has been growing ever since. In those years of the burgeoning of expressive painting, defined by gesture, matter and a knack for evoking images, he was one of the few sculptors of his generation to stake out his own personal space in exhibitions and debates. While he has been acclaimed by some for exploring local traditions to create his unique voice, his curiosity led him to research the origins of a wide variety of stylistic approaches, beginning with those he had closest at hand, such as the Galician Romanesque and Baroque, yet relating them at all times to contemporary proposals.

Similarly, architecture, design and even civilizations far removed from his own surroundings, are objects of interest, analysed always for three-dimensional matters: the solidity of coastal buildings, a presence which when in ruins is imbued with a magic, symbolic quality; the movement that Simón Rodríguez infuses into his façades and alter-pieces, shifting the heavy elements to the upper parts; the almost intimate way in which Asorey combines the monumental and the familiar, the way he works with scale; the abrupt monumentality of Mexican sculpture; how everyday objects work... Leiro's attitude is one of conversation, of dialogue with historical and current sculpture, invariably viewed directly; and his analysis, methodical and visceral.

In effect, notwithstanding the local power of some of the themes that provide access to his works, Leiro's oeuvre, alongside that of Juan Muñoz, Thomas Schütte and Stephan Balkenhol, is an indispensable factor in understanding the outings of the best figurative, European sculpture of the late 20th century.

Among the elements that clearly define and individualize his oeuvre is an underlying kind of oral tradition (visual too, of course) found in many of his compositions. And the refined and popular mythology of sayings and proverbs, of rural-based wisdom: few sculptors possess his ability, or even his ease, to translate into three dimensions the haiku-like paradoxes contained in popular names and stories. And fewer still are able to radicalize their approach by defending its contemporaneity.

In 1991, when he took stock of his works, he put them into three groups: figures, sculptures and things. Aware that many of them could fit into various categories, for him it was a question of defending their intent, the debates they contained. The more narrative sense of the figures, the three-dimensional problems solved by the sculptures and the works that are most like objects.

The ones that are brought together in “Lo antropomórfico” have as their starting point his trips to Mexico, at the time when, in search of new dialogues and incentives, he decided to open a studio, firstly in Madrid and subsequently in New York. In Mexico he was surprised by Aztec sculpture, its broken forms, its harshness and even its cruel nature. He started to produce schematic works, which focussed on painful, confrontational situations: the struggle, in a ham leg vice, of an organic body part and the piece of metal that torments it; the broken body, shattered, by falling on a rock, a specific example being *Carroña* [Carrion], the germ for later sculptures. O his suite of *Pavitas* [Turkey chicks], commencing with *Guajolote*, which has three points of support, a solution that provides dynamism and stability all at once.

In this exhibition, designed for MARCO, Leiro has prepared works that respond, sometimes paradoxically, to the peculiarities of the space, which only goes to prove that he has one of the most highly developed senses of space and planning of all his fellow sculptors.

Miguel Fernández-Cid
Curator of the exhibition



Francisco Leiro in his studio in Cambados. Photo: Tono Arias

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Francisco Leiro is regarded as one of the best representatives of the current art scene. Born in Cambados, Pontevedra in 1957, he lives and works between New York, Madrid and Galicia.

The son and grandson of skilled cabinetmakers, he was familiar with woodworking from a very early age. In addition to being self-taught, in the mid 1970s he trained at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios in Santiago de Compostela, and went on to further his studies at the Escuela de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, in Madrid. His work as a sculptor combines a use of classic materials such as granite and wood with other synthetic-based ones such as resins, fibreglass, vinyl, and polyester.

His career as an artist began in the 1970s, with his first exhibition at the Sociedad Cultural de Cambados in 1975. In 1983 he was invited to take part in the last exhibition of the *Atlántica* group, the aim of which was to renew Galician visual arts. In 1985 he represented Spain in the São Paulo Biennial, Brazil, and he travelled to Greece and Mexico to study in situ archaic sculpture. He moved to New York to live in 1987 thanks to a Fulbright Scholarship, and shortly afterwards he began to work with the Marlborough Gallery. Since then, his work has been exhibited regularly at the gallery's various branches as well as at museums in Spain and worldwide.

Some selected highlights of the numerous solo and group shows the artist has participated in are the following: *Leiro* (CAC, Málaga, 2017), *Os traballos e os días* (Abanca, Pontevedra, 2016), *Purgatorio* (Galería Marlborough, Madrid, 2014), *Human Resources* (Marlborough Gallery, New York, 2013), *Francisco Leiro. Celebrando el Códice Calixtino* (Palacete de las Medonza, Pontevedra, 2010), *El Jardín de las Delicias. El Romeral de San Marcos* (Segovia, 2007), *Compañía* (Galería Marlborough, Madrid, 2006), *Diálogos de Silencio* (Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, New York, 2005), *Caracteres* (Instituto Cervantes, New York, 2005), *Leiro* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2004) and the touring exhibition organized by SEACEX in 2003 and 2004 (National Gallery of Foreign Art in Sofia -Bulgaria- and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago de Chile). As a sculptor of works for public spaces, since the end of the 80s he has been commissioned to make sculptures for various locations in Galicia (Vigo, Pontevedra, Santiago de Compostela, A Coruña), in Cantabria, Madrid, and France.

His artworks are included in museum collections and in private and public collections, such as the Auditorio de Galicia, Santiago de Compostela; CAAM Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria; Centro de Arte Caja de Burgos; CGAC Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela; Colección Abanca, A Coruña; Colección Afundación, Vigo; Colección Unión Fenosa, Madrid; Fundación Coca-Cola, Madrid; Fundació la Caixa, Barcelona; Fundación Telefónica, Madrid; MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Barcelona; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Patio Herreriano, Valladolid; Centro Cultural São Lourenço, Almancil, Portugal; Grounds for Sculpture, New Jersey, United States; Museo Marugame Hirai, Kagawa, Japan; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Holland; Akron Art Museum, Ohio, United States.

He has received a number of prizes and distinctions including: The Gold Medal of Galicia (2016), National Galician Culture Prize (2008), the CEOE Fine Arts Medal (2003), and the Castelao Medal, Xunta de Galicia (2000). He was appointed a member of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in February 2022.

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 for school children

With the support of: Obra Social “la Caixa”

Until the 17th of June, 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”

Until the 28th of May, 2022

Hours: Saturday from 11am to 12:30pm (age 3-6) and from 12:30pm to 2pm (age 7-12)

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

Summer Workshops for Children

With the support of: Obra Social “la Caixa”

From 5th to 29th of July, 2022

Hours: Tuesday to Friday from 12pm to 2pm

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.

Press and Communications Office

Marta Viana Tomé

Tel. +34 986 113908 / 113904 / 113900

comunicacion@marcovigo.com