

PRESS RELEASE

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## MANUEL VILARIÑO

### Horse Silk



Manuel Vilariño. *Abada*, 2010. Hahnemühle on aluminum, 150 x 200 cm. ©Manuel Vilariño. VEGAP, Madrid 2020

**17 September 2020 – 31 January 2021**

MARCO, 1<sup>st</sup> floor galleries

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

Curated by: Fernando Castro Flórez

Exhibition produced by Subdirección General de Museos Estatales  
del Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte



**PROMOCIÓN DEL ARTE**

## OVERVIEW

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*Seda de caballo* [Horse Silk] is the most comprehensive exhibition on **Manuel Vilariño's** work to date. Photographer and poet, 2007 Photography National Award. Curated by Fernando Castro Flórez the exhibition shows the artist's career through a selection of photographs, installations and videos together with a scent of his poetic production, from 1980 to date. The exhibition is not displayed as a retrospective; rather, it shows the most outstanding elements of his aesthetics and allows us to review the fertile career of this creator, with such crucial aspects as the poetic background and the search for a contemplative attitude.

From a more formal, conceptual order other than a chronological point of view, the way the works have been selected and arranged in the rooms responds to the desire to maintain a poetic, thematic and environmental continuity that gives meaning to the layout and to all of Vilariño's work as a whole.

The setting up of the exhibition at the MAROC takes viewers from Vilariño's particular perspective of animals and his reinterpretation of a classical genre as still life – Vilariño as a great master of still life– to landscapes visions closely related to melancholy in a permanent and subtle dialogue between life and death.

The series corresponding to the eighties and nineties –birds, skulls, and bestiaries, including their famous polyptychs *Los Pájaros*, *Cabezas/Sueños*– conform the first stage of the visit. The intensity of *Bestias involuntarias* stands out, a series of black and white photographs in which animals stares us in the face. They are portrayed together along with tools, in an assembly between magic and everyday life, between nature and human intervention.

Considered the centrepiece of the show, *Paraíso fragmentado* colour shows up in a playful transition from black and white in this piece. An emblematic work, a mosaic of still lifes made up of fifteen photographs in which a bird, a lizard or a snake lie inert, creating among all the images a unique composition that symbolically alludes to devotion and a yearning for resurrection.

From here, the focus is on the works of the following decades, around year 2000, such as *Crucifixión de los siete cielos* or *Cruz de luz borrada* –still lifes that compose ritual scenes in which colour acquires special relevance. His series of still lifes of candles and skulls –*Membrillos*, *Granadas*– represent apparently simple compositions in which a butterfly on an open Mass Book, or some decomposing fruits, remain in the shadow of the flame of a burning candle. Scenes in which there is room for mythological allusions and references to the cycle of life and death which bring us back to the essentials of the classic genre.

The exhibition includes examples of his production from the last two decades, mainly his photographs of mountains and oceans, such as *Al despertar*, *Lejano interior*, or *Montaña negra, nube blanca*. Works that seems to be more scenic, and yet have a strong sense of drama, almost tragic, although with a look and breadth of horizon as if opened to hope.

There is a key presence of poetry in this circular tour through Vilariño's work: fragments of his poetry books *Ruinas al despertar*, and *Animal insomne* accompany the visitor from the access stairs to the exhibition; and a selection from the series of haikus written during confinement –an unpublished work titled *Elogio del confin*– complete and become integral part of his photographs. The video screened in the MARCO's main lobby room also delves into this aspect –the artist talks here about his creative process, in action and contemplation at the same time.

In the curator's words, all of Manuel Vilariño's work is a vital self-portrait. His thoughts and emotions in relation to life and nature, his environment, his studies in biology, his intimate connection with the nearest territory. Alongwith this idea, the exhibition is conceived keeping in mind his three qualities of observer, photographer and poet which give shape to his work and career; the relationship between biology, photography and literature has always come along.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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**Manuel Vilariño** (A Coruña, 1952), is a photographer and poet. He is one of the most outstanding artists of the contemporary art scene. From the moment he held his first exhibition in 1982, his work has been kept on display around multiple remarkable galleries and museums becoming part of their collections, such as the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, at the Fine Arts Museum in Boston, at the Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo (MEIAC) in Badajoz, ARTIUM in Vitoria or the Coca-Cola Art Collection.

In 2007 he was awarded the National Photography Award by the Ministry of Culture of Spain. During the same year he took part in the exhibition *Paraíso fragmentado*, curated by Alberto Ruiz de Samaniego, at the Spanish Pavilion in the Venice Biennial.

Among his most outstanding exhibitions, we can recall as remarkable the one held in 2002 at the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea of Santiago de Compostela *Manuel Vilariño. Fío e sombra*, or *Mar de afuera* held at the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid in 2012. He has exhibited internationally at Galerie Municipale du Château d'Eau, Toulouse (solo show, 2001), and participated in other exhibitions in several European countries. In 2008 the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) organized an itinerary exhibition with his works, curated by Fernando Castro Flórez, and it was displayed at the Centro Cultural de España in Asunción (Paraguay), the Museo Balmes in Montevideo (Uruguay), the Museo de Arte Moderno in Sao Paulo (Brazil) and at the MAC Niteroi in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil).

He participated in the 2012 edition of the project *Peregrinatio* in Sagunto, organized by the Consorcio de Museos of the Comunidad Valenciana and in 2013 he carried out the project *Fragmentos de un viaje*, as a result of a poetic tour around Extremadura held at the MEIAC, Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano of Badajoz.

Many outstanding poets have been attracted to write about the artworks of Manuel Vilariño, such as Antonio Gamoneda, Chantal Maillard or Juan Barja, writers like Manuel Rivas, philosophers like Félix Duque and critics like Miguel Fernández-Cid, Miguel Copón or Alberto Ruiz de Samaniego.

His photography is interrelated to a sense of poetry —*Ruinas al despertar* (Espiral Maior Edicións, 2011); or *Animal insomne* (Trifolium, 2017)— according to what he asserted “my photography would not exist without poetry; together become a whole [...]”.

<http://www.manuelvilarino.info/>

## CURATORIAL TEXT

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### *Luminous Shadows of Manuel Vilariño*

Fernando Castro Flórez, curator of the exhibition

Birds, beaches, mountains, ice, twilights and waves, the "abyssal sea", in a beautiful verse by Gamoneda, and the foggy rhinoceros, the owl and the words that starkly allude to an absence. The horizon of shocking purity in Manuel Vilariño's photographs makes us face an aesthetic of incomparable poetic beauty, demanding and subtle, true and, therefore, gloomy. Alberto Ruiz de Samaniego notices that the work of Vilariño is shown to us with a "paradoxical serenity", with a tension between a near outside and an interior distance, which requires "a calm gesture", a calm luminosity. Vilariño's photographs bring us *back to earth*. We have to assume the conflict of the work of art, that is, the relationship *between* world and earth. Only by crossing the twilight of the places can we return to the mountains and the forest, to the place that, even in the dark, teaches us something. It is there, in that area of the unknown, where art seeks its subject or, better, where obsessions take root. One must learn from the growth of things in nature and get to decide when is the right time. By chance chronological and meteorological time tells us of anything but a mixture, that is, of the *kairós*, or which is propitious. The light that makes things visible imposes the time of nature: there the cut and the continuity, the static and the fluid come together. Although photography is the faithful evocative testimony of reality, a means to remember, it also has a singular sentimental charge, in which it goes from happiness to tragedy, that is, in Barthes' terms, it is a reduplication of what has been but also a *theater of death*. Vilariño's tragic wisdom touches us by specifying the sacrifice, by beautifully illuminating finitude.

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Manuel Vilariño's song of existence is an intense and risky dwelling in the open; trying to reach the origin of the origin, the *aión*, the photographer enchants us with his nests of spices, with his binds and his shattered paradises. Rilke points out, in his *Duino Elegies*, that all the eyes of humanness are directed towards the open. Only our eyes, turned upside down, like a circle of traps, block all exits. We do not know what is beyond the circle "except through the eyes of the animals." That is what Vilariño seeks in his *Involuntary Beasts*, his eyes fixed on the distance: to aspire to that borderless, limpid existence. The most risky are those who want more; singing is belonging to the totality of pure perception. The photographer has felt the force of the wind from the unprecedented center of pure nature, without having to enter into the clearing.

Our trips may not have any purpose and we wander to get to nowhere or just to reach the sunset. We live between the hunt and the game of hide and seek, we want the prey even though in the end what appears is only the shadow. We are inevitably thrown into existence between the hole and the shadow. The photographer depicts dark animals, some of which he describes as "insomniacs", icebergs illuminated with ice indicating a foreboding blackness, mountains which both enchant and disturb us.

Manuel Vilariño is a great master of *still life*, characterized by great poetic intensity. An "ambush" who comes over and over again, archetype of the shadow. Vilariño has created in recent years some fascinating compositions in which the artist essentializes the classical technique by using elements such as a candle, fruits or hanging birds.

In a very bare setting we witness not so much the apotheosis of mourning, but a chromatic display; Vilariño highlights the colors of the dead animals, intensifies the texture of the food while the omnipresent flame of the candle seems to enter a dreamlike dimension. To some extent, this artist is materializing what remains of the folds of the dream: a butterfly on an open missal, some rotten lemons, a beetle that seems to climb on the vanishing wax. Further than literalism, Vilariño produces an extraordinary game of variations in which he does not precisely drown out the fantasy of flight but rather invites the viewer to enter images that deserve the qualification of "generous." Vilariño's work –an immense still life–, enforces an enigmatic inner light. The artist's intention is to let the animal or better, the earthly, be. By doing so, he keeps the world open. What remains in our epilogal era, what makes mankind happy, can be eroticism again, laughter or joy at the time of death. An open-wide-naked eyes photographer awaits, then composes ritual scenes to give space to what is properly invisible. Vilariño's beautiful journey to a north that is radical outside has something of an Orphic journey, of a "dark shudder" in pursuit of the beloved shadow.

If Manuel Vilariño evokes loneliness, silence or death, his work also reveals traces of tenderness, the enjoyment of playing and the happiness of the encounter that the trip provides. In one of his texts he points out: beyond an apparent reality, the gaze of the vertigo of an instant germinates "in the forest of shadows." He is capable of generating images that are, at the same time, dramatic and capable of transmitting the intensity of life, moving between lightness and darkness, dawn and twilight. This photographer who has the soul of a poet knows that the work of art is a questioning which does not long for a definitive answer.

Beauty occurs almost accidentally. Vilariño speaks of a nostalgia for beauty that forces him to stay in the vicinity of death, in a rare dimension of happiness that arises from a nihilistic background, in the certainty of finitude. "The remains of animals –he writes with enormous lucidity–, their bones, strangle my thought, they set me apart from my thoughts and recognized boundaries. The horizon becomes active subconscious, or labyrinth, the desires. Automatism and chance work in an unexplored background. May the crucial be where the remainings are, in the poetic residue. Once again, remembering Celan, "speaks true who speaks shadow".

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**Fernando Castro Flórez** (Plasencia, 1964) works as a Professor at the Institute of Aesthetics and Theory of Arts, Autonomous University, Madrid. He collaborates as an art critic for the supplement of newspaper *ABC Cultural*. He has written regularly in cultural supplement of newspapers such as *El País*, *Diario16*, *El Independiente*, *El Sol*, and *El Mundo*, among others; and magazines such as *Descubrir el Arte* and *Revista de Occidente*. Director of the magazine *Cuadernos del IVAM* and member of the editorial board of *Pasajes*. He has been member of the Museo Reina Sofía Board of Trustees and he is member of the Museum's Acquisitions Committee. He has curated a number of exhibitions such as the Chile Triennial, the Curitiba Biennial or the Chile Pavilion at the Venice Biennial 2011. He has curated solo exhibitions of Anselm Kiefer, Tony Cragg, David Nash, Nacho Criado, Fernando Sinaga or Antón Lamazares

As an editor and translator, he has been in charge of publications such as Walter Benjamin work. He is author, among others, of the following publications: *Elogio de la pereza. Notas para una estética del cansancio* (Julio Ollero, 1992), *Escaramuzas. El arte en el tiempo de la demolición* (CendeaC, 2003), *Sainetes y otros desafueros del arte contemporáneo* (CendeaC, 2007), *Una "verdad" pública. Consideraciones sobre el arte contemporáneo* (Documenta, 2010) or *Contra el bienalismo. Crónicas fragmentarias del extraño mapa actual* (Akal, 2012).



## GENERAL INFORMATION / DOCUMENTATION / PARALLEL ACTIVITIES

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### Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition includes a catalogue published in 2013 by the Spanish Ministry of Culture, with texts by Fernando Castro Flórez (exhibition curator), Alberto Ruiz de Samaniego and Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro. It also includes a poem by the artist and images of the exhibited works.

### Documentation

The Library-Documentation Center at MARCO has prepared a **documentary dossier**, which brings together links to articles and other information about Manuel Vilarinho which is available on the website [www.marcovigo.com](http://www.marcovigo.com) at [Library/News](#) and [Exhibitions/Present](#). Furthermore, as part of the exhibition, one of the galleries a **selection of catalogues, publications and graphics** is displayed.

### Learning Activities

For groups of Pre-School, Primary, Secondary, High School and others.

With the support of: Obra Social “la Caixa”

From 17 March, 2020

Place: exhibition halls and Laboratorio das Artes

Hours: Tuesday to Friday from 11am to 1:30pm / For booking please call +34 986 113900/113904

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### 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

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### Contact Press and Communications Department

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