

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**"MELODRAMA" EXHIBITION**

**DATES:** March 22<sup>nd</sup> – June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2003

**VENUE:** Ground floor exhibition rooms at the MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo.

**OPENING TIMES:** Tuesdays to Sundays (bank holidays included): from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. From 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. on Fridays.

**CURATOR:** Doreet LeVitte Harten

**GENERAL COORDINATOR:** Markus Mascher

**COORDINATED AT MARCO BY:** Luisa Ramos

**ORGANISERS:** an exhibition organised and co-produced by MARCO - Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo; Artium - Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo de Vitoria; and Centro José Guerrero – Palacio de los Condes de Gambia de Granada.

**GUEST ARTISTS:** 34

Darren Almond (1971, Wigan, UK)  
Vasco Araujo (1975, Lisbon, Portugal)  
Farah Bajull (Iran. Living and working in London)  
Glenn Brown (1966, Northumberland, UK)  
Dale Chihuly (1941, Tacoma, Washington)  
Victoria Civera (1955, Port de Sagunt)  
Nigel Cooke (1973, Manchester, UK)  
Bryan Crockett (1970, Santa Barbara, California)  
Wim Delvoye (1965, Werwik, Belgium)  
Joan Fontcuberta (1955, Barcelona)  
John Isaacs (1968, Lancaster, UK)  
Christian Jankowski (1968, Göttingen)  
Stuart Klipper (1941, New York)  
Julian J.B. LaVerdiere (1971, Adirondak Mountains, New York)  
Leopoldo Ferrán & Agustina Otero (living and working in Ituren, Hondarribia and Paris)  
Robert Longo (1953, Brooklyn)  
Valeriano López (1963, Huéscar, Granada)  
Liza Lou (living and working in Los Angeles, California)  
Kenny MacLeod (1967, Aberdeen, Scotland)  
Markus Muntean & Adi Rosenblum (1962, working together from 1992)  
Tim Noble & Sue Webster (1966, Stroud, UK. 1967, Leicester, UK)  
Nathalie Melikian (1966, Vancouver, Canadá)  
Tracey Moffatt (1960, Brisbane, Australia)  
Paul Morrison (1966, Liverpool, UK)  
Raymond Pettibon (1957, Tucson, Arizona)  
Patricia Piccinini (1965, Freetwon, Sierra Leone. Living and working in Melbourne)  
Julian Rosefeldt (1965, Munich, Germany)  
Sue de Beer & Laura Parnes (1973, Tarrytown, New York. 1988, Búfalo, New York)  
Jane Simpson (1965, living and working in London)  
Lily van der Stokker (1954, s'Hertogenbosh, Holland)  
Hiroshi Sugimoto (1948, Tokyo)  
Sergio Vega (living and working in Gainesville, Florida)  
Francesco Vezzoli (1971, Brescia, Italy)  
Azucena Vieites (1967, Hernani. Living and working in Madrid)

**NUMBER OF PIECES EXHIBITED: 70**

Sculptures:	11	Video installations:	10
Paintings:	14	Installations:	3
Drawings:	23	Photographs:	5
Mural paintings:	2	Photographic series:	2

**CATALOGUE:**

The Vigo *Museum of Contemporary Art* has published, jointly with *Artium* from Vitoria and the *Centro José Guerrero* from Granada, a trilingual catalogue which features introductory texts by different personalities, a text by the curator, Doreet Levitte Harten, another by Pedro Almodóvar and finally another by Juan Miguel Company; reproductions of the pieces exhibited, the artists' biographies and translations.

**THE CURATOR:**

Doreet LeVitte Harten was born in Tel Aviv and has been living in Germany for over twenty years.

She studied Art History in Israel, Italy and Germany, and graduated in Religion and Comparative Anthropology at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. In Israel she worked as an art critic for the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, and lectured at the Jerusalem Art Academy. Since her arrival in Germany, she has worked as a curator for the exhibitions *BiNationale Israel - USSR* and *Heaven* at the Düsseldorf *Kunsthalle*, the exhibition entitled "Power" at the Luxemburg Casino, showings at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, the Artists House, Moscow, and The Tate Gallery, Liverpool among others. She has written a large number of essays and books on artists and contemporary art.

**SYNTHETIC VIEW OF THE EXHIBITION PROJECT:**

One of the programming pursuits of *MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo*, is the organisation of "thesis" or "theme" exhibitions, which are generally collective and multidisciplinary, national and international. This intended series, displayed on the main floor of the museum, started with the inaugural showing entitled "Cardinales" and is now continued with the setting up of "Melodrama". The latter has been already showed at *Artium* (Vitoria), as its inaugural exhibition, as well as at *Centro José Guerrero* (Granada).

"Melodrama", as in "exteriorisation and exaggeration of feelings", has become the central motif of many present-day artists. The logical and distant approach of conceptual art during the seventies and sixties and the more historical and sociological interest which dominated contemporary art until the late eighties were replaced in the nineties by a growing appreciation of feelings.

*Melodrama* is an exhibition which reflects that attitude. 34 artists participate in it, people working in different fields of creation and using different media: painting, sculpture, photography, video and installations. They are not all melodramatic by choice, intention or judgement; but they all recognise the possibilities of the genre, whether it be through affinity or through a critical or ironic process, they consciously use melodramatic techniques in order to reach their goals.

**A brief look at the historical background**

Melodrama first appeared in France and England, and took on its specific characteristics after the French Revolution and the start of the Industrial Revolution. Before that time, only official theatres could make use of speech in their shows. The other theatres, closer to the emerging middle and working classes, started resorting to the exaggeration of gestures and the abundance of tunes and stunts in order to compensate for the want, which materialised in a new dramatic language. In spite of these new times, these expressive resources had been so successful that their aesthetics of excess were never abandoned.

## **The melodramatic look**

Melodrama, as a genre, established a repertoire of types (the hero, the heroine, the villain), of codified gestures (exaggerated grief and mirth) and of stereotypical messages (the happy ending, good and evil); This aesthetic, to sum up, was adopted by the cinema industry, publicity, television and the mass media. In this way, different semiotics intrinsic to each one of these media which, in turn, constitute a rich linguistic repertoire for current plastic artists. Nowadays, as there is no border between good and bad taste, numerous creators explore in their work the aesthetic of melodrama and look into its procedures.

Submersed in a sea of audio-visual stimuli, stunned by the impact of messages globally cast by the mass media and the entertainment industry, these artists are very aware of the fact that what was said in a self-contained fashion before, must now be expressed "in style". Exaggeration of feeling is a central motif to many of them, as are the attempts to emphasise the "I" and to find a deeper meaning in an alienated world deprived of the idea of the sacred.

Some of the keys or epigraphs which will help us understand better the contribution of each one of the pieces to the exhibition's discourse are as follows:

- Melodramatic nature (which pieces such as Robert Longo's or Stuart Klipper's)
- Melodrama and cinema (Tracey Moffat, Farra Bajull)
- Melodrama and TV (Julian Rosefeldt, Christian Jankowski)
- Melodrama and music (Vasco Araujo, Natalie Melikian)
- The innards of melodrama (John Isaacs, Sue de Beer & Laura Parnes, Bryan Crockett)
- The aesthetic of excess (Liza Lou, Wim Delvoye, Francesco Vezzoli)

## **TEXT BY THE CURATOR:**

Melodrama acquired its specific profile by the end of the 18th century in the wake of the Revolution in France and the Industrial Revolution in England. During the French Monarchy the king gave a monopoly only to the official theatres like the Comédie Française and the Royal Opera, so the text could be spoken only there while other theatres that served the less aristocratic classes were prevented of using any narrative. In order to compensate for the lack of words the plays were based on exaggeration of gestures, a wealth of special effects and the use of melodies all of which were substitutes for the missing speech.

After the French Revolution the common theatres were allowed to integrate texts into their plots but the aesthetic of excess that was created before hasn't been abandoned. With the rise of the Bourgeoisie and the forming of the Proletarian class melodrama becomes the natural aesthetic form that echoes and responds to the problems and wishes created by the new social order.

The world after the French Revolution became a secular and enlightened world yet the need to assert morality and justice, to differentiate between good and evil was still there and needed an expression. It is here that melodrama fulfils its goal by affirming the victory of virtue over vice, by giving form to the new values, such as the idea of the family as the core of the new social order and the moral superiority of the poor, innocent and virtuous. To give these ideas an adequate expression melodrama concentrates on canonical roles like the hero, the heroine and the villain. It allows only a happy end and can not dwell in the complexity of the individual character; its message must be clear.

The aesthetic of melodrama was adapted right away by the film industry. Since the first movies have been silent the substitutes that served melodrama were employed as well. But as in the case of melodrama the strategy of exaggeration and excess was not obliterated with the invention of sound but adapted by the system. It helped to create an aesthetic form that was accessible and coherent to the masses.

The melodramatic imagination found its place in the visual arts when the definitions of high and low taste were crumbling down in a post-modern era that didn't recognize such hierarchies any more.

Many contemporary artists employ the characteristics of melodrama in the contents, form and dimensions of their works, in their exaggerated manner through which they expressed their ideas.

Since we are surrounded by a myriad of visual and acoustic impact produced by cinematic experience, advertisement and events, the artists are aware of the fact that what was said before in understatement must be now expressed in high key. The exaggeration of feeling is a central motive for many of them because they are the individual expression of the self in an alienated world.

MELODRAMA is an exhibition which reflects that attitude. Thirty four artists take part in it, artists working in different fields of creation: painting, sculpture, installations, photography, video. Not all of them are melodramatic by choice, intention or judgement, but all recognise the possibilities of the genre and, whether it be because of affinity or of a critical process, they use melodramatic techniques in order to achieve their aims.

## REQUEST FOR GRAPHIC MATERIAL

### GRAPHIC MATERIAL AVAILABLE TO THE PRESS:

CD including texts and photographs of the exhibition in different formats.

**IF YOU WISH TO RECEIVE DOCUMENTATION, PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND SEND IT BY E-MAIL, FAX OR MAIL POST TO:**

### MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

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