

# ÁLVARO DE LA VEGA.

## THE TREE OF LIFE

Without a doubt, the *Tree of Life* constitutes one of the main archetypes or mythemes of the great mythologies. In addition, the inherent sacredness of the concept is rooted in –or is connected to– a long philosophical-religious tradition; one that brings together the Eastern and Western civilisations. The alchemical philosopher's stone and elixir of eternal youth; the *Tree of Life* symbolises in Catholicism this unscathed humanity, of flawless men and women, still oblivious to the original sin that will precipitate their fall. Its fruits: the bread and wine, which, through the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic consecration, will become the body and blood of Christ.

But, Álvaro de la Vega's depiction of the *Tree of Life* differs greatly from the tree of life mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Because his is in fact a fallen tree. The branches no longer scrape the sky, but are diabolically confined to the earth. However, Álvaro de la Vega decides not to make firewood from this spiritually *fallen tree*. And in this way, his axe will savagely strike this wood, in whose heartwood, original sin is hidden.

It is almost as if he has assumed the role of an executioner, who, by divine mandate, has executed this exemplary punishment: to unmask those responsible for the misrepresentation of humanity.

Álvaro de la Vega (Paradela, Lugo, 1954) studied fine arts in Barcelona, and the style of painting that he learned during this training phase is his usual means of expression. Back in Galicia, he has begun to explore sculptural language, using human and animal figures as his point of departure. The use of paint as a way of boosting the sculpture's expressive value will be a very characteristic element of these first wooden pieces.

As the artist starts to consolidate his sculptural language, he has also begun to experiment with other materials including iron, ceramics and stone, all of which are tied to nature and traditional professions. The space-work-spectator interrelation will form the core concept of his artistic discourse. His work is exhibited in important galleries and institutions, and his pieces also form part of highly-renowned private and public collections.

# WOODEN SCULPTURE

To Álvaro de la Vega, wood is much more than simply an alternative material. It is the ideal substance, the optimum material, the perfect raw material for transformation. Consubstantial. By birth, experiences and culture. Vertebral. Only through its rings may these fundamental ideas circulate. Relationships are getting narrower and the affections are intensifying. Consanguineous. Filling up, gaining this three-dimensional

character, taking over the space, striking the audience with its ligneous nature.

The material, first. Always. Inert. And the artist, the spectator, the route, the idea and life, follows. Cuts which are the lines of this floating drawing that bears witness to the process, this courtship, copulation and labour. And this relationship between the wood and the axe always turns out to be so honest, the main tool of the betrothals.

# THE MEMORY OF THE MATERIAL

All of the pieces of this opus magnum share this memory, this journey. After the eucalyptus have grown in the forest, their trunks are chopped down by the experienced hands of the woodcutters, before subsequently shaping the mussel platforms which are found anchored in the estuary. The weather, the sea, the rusting of the iron nails, naturally dye the raw materials which the sculptor has to work with. Blackened wood, purple. And once again,

more axe blows, perhaps not always well-aimed, yet nonetheless managing to speed up this labour, in pursuit of the artistic designs imbued by a muse.

Light touches of paint on the underwear and female lips, that is all. The subtle lighting does not mask the scars of this work, the blows inflicted by the tools, the lines of a path which we can trace with certain ease. A finished result which, without a doubt, represents the authenticity of the experience.

# THE PARTY FIELD

These exhibition rooms now play host to a sexual party, celebrating the “good” life, which of course we are invited to. In this way, the spectator joins the ranks of the passive individuals. But their indifference is relative. Because, unlike the ligneous characters, when facing their dull, frozen cry, our pulsating nature will revel in the privilege which has been granted to us by this sculptural work. This free movement through the different exhibition spaces, through this fourth

dimension, will certainly offer the audience unique pieces of work at every step that they take. Personal perceptions, and unique perspectives which exponentially multiply the value of these pieces. Experiences that will remain within us as memories. An image and idea reserve which we can return to when looking for inspiration or when simply driven by nostalgia.

# THE GARDEN OF DELIGHTS

Welcome to this particular Garden of delights! A pseudo-paradise in which the inhabitants succumb to sin. A lustful humanity plunging into emptiness, into perdition. The madness which has already seized some sick minds. A sexual pleasure which is as ephemeral as the life of those fruits, from our *Tree of Life*. Lecherous fruits at the doors of putrefaction.

A sculptural re-interpretation of a famous and historical triptych. A review and update of the central panel of the extremely well-known painting by Bosch. The main and only scene of this theatrical representation in which the *Garden of Eden* is the virginal prelude and *Hell* is the foolish apotheosis.

But why presuppose the impending embarrassment and shame of our characters?

Why not bring an end once and for all to the misogyny of this story in which Eve is portrayed as the nauseating incarnation of sin? And what if we were in front of a human paradise, free from biblical guilt and Christian penance? Rather than this dystopian future recreated by Saramago in *Death with Interruptions*, with its joyful destruction of a church which consolidated its prosperous and millenary business on the figure of that Death, that, inexplicably, took leave. No. The authentic Promised Land. The promise of an immortal and implacable goddess named Liberty, the lifetime ruler of her growing dominion. This is the only way that the *Tree of Life* will finally be able to become *The Tree of "Good" Life*.

# THE PRODUCED WORK

In line with the objectives and characteristics which have been chosen for the METRÓPOLIS series, Álvaro de Vega's exhibition display includes a newly produced piece of work, the *Tree of Life*, which has been specifically created for this area and space. Through this piece he hopes to be able to bring the audience closer to the creative process, searching for a certain contextualisation of his work, taking into consideration the characteristics, dimensions and lighting of this particular space, and the way in which it can be explored.

Álvaro de la Vega considers the *Tree of Life*, the montage being exhibited in the MARCO and which the artist has been working on for a decade — to be a single piece of work, an essential idea which has been materialised in a single piece, made up of 375 individual ones. Essentially it portrays groups of people who have either already giving free rein to their impulses, or who are about to do so. Active and passive individuals, libidinous participants, or voluptuous spectators of this modern bacchanal, with renewed satyrs, maenads, fauns and bacchantes.

# PRIMITIVE EXPRESSIONISM

Since the end of the nineteenth century, a certain fascination for primitive cultures has been evident in Western art. Expressive visual forms of ancestral peoples form part of Historical Avant-guard art such as Cubism and Expressionism: masks from faraway African tribes, ancient Egyptian paintings, enigmatic Iberian sculptures, archaic Polynesian totems... Drawn in by this extraordinary freedom of expression, the vanguardist volumetric and chromatic conceptions and even the ritual transcendence of objects in direct contact with natural forces and spirits, some of the most revolutionary artists

would go on to incorporate some of these references into their work.

Álvaro de la Vega's approach to primitive presuppositions of an expressionist nature responds to two fundamental causes. On the one hand, his connection and fondness of the sculptural past, and on the other hand, this ideological militancy which advocates a return to basic impulses and materials, instead of the sophistication of art centred in knowledge. Through this approach he has demonstrated his commitment to this art which is transversal to time.

# CHILDHOOD AND THE INTERIOR LANDSCAPE

The future of the human being develops in childhood. This is at least the opinion of psychoanalysis, a Freudian discipline in which this stage is decisive, allowing for the structure of the individual's personality to be determined. Álvaro de la Vega draws his main influences from his childhood, his particular way of filtering reality and this is the key to his sensitivity.

Relocation of ideas without too much geography. A silent physical map. Interior landscape. The culture of a woodcutter. The child who fuelled the oven at home. Regression to childhood. Childish curiosity. The engine which makes the artist move forward.