ALMINE RECH

MIQUEL BARCELÓ
METAMORPHOSIS

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The exhibition *Miquel Barceló. Metamorphosis*, curated by Enrique Juncosa, focuses on the artist's culturally nomadic nature. It is also a critical view of creation as a project of unlimited progress: each of his works leads us to another, in a cyclical process of reinvention. Based on the reality that he sees, experiences, reads about and imagines, his representations contain sociological and ecological nuances, while also expressing a passionate inner life.

Like Pablo Picasso, for Barceló ceramics, painting and drawing are all variations, experiments on a whole. "Each work is experimental. Each work is a trial run for another that will probably never exist. I think this is as true of my painting as my ceramics - or any other thing I make". He says that what he has learnt from Picasso is "a kind of generic influence, a way of relating to life, a way of being in the world". A constant renewal of the search; a versatile exploration of new supports; the interrelation of diverse techniques and artistic periods; a way of working that is incessant and vertiginous; chromatic richness; discourse with traditional canons; a fascination with mythology and the archaic symbolism of bullfighting; illustrating books... These things somehow create a bond between the two Spanish artists, as cosmopolitans, as children of the Mediterranean, and as creators of an art that is as primitive as it is irresistibly modern.

A nomadic artist

Miquel Barceló (Felanich, Balearic Islands, 8th January 1957), is one of the most high-profile and internationally renowned Spanish artists of his generation. He made his name in the context of the expressionist spirit that flourished in the 1980s. As a teenager he travelled to Paris, a city that had such a strong artistic impact on him that he began to take drawing and modelling classes at the Escuela de Artes Decorativas in Palma de Mallorca that same year. Shortly afterwards he enrolled at the Escuela de Bellas Artes Sant Jordi, in Barcelona, attending for only a few months before continuing his training self-taught. As a young artist his participation in the Sâo Paulo Biennial (1981) and Kassel Documenta VII (1982) launched him onto the international art scene at a time when museums and galleries around the world were beginning to show an interest in his work. Over the next few years received major awards, such as Spain's National Art Prize (1986) and the Prince of Asturias Award for the Arts (2003). In 2007, he presented his extraordinary ceramic altarpiece for Palma de Mallorca cathedral, in which he depicted the miracle of the bread and the fishes. At the end of 2008, he became famous worldwide for the domed ceiling of the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Chamber, in the United Nations' Palais des Nations in Geneva, on which he masterfully depicted a huge ocean with thousands of marine stalactites.

Miquel Barceló possesses enormous vitality wherever he goes, be it Africa, Latin America, Japan, Nepal, Paris, or the island of Mallorca, where he was born. He is at home anywhere he sets up his studio, and that is where he feeds his inspiration: with light, dust, air, earth, water and even what other artists are doing in the area. He also carries with him the great European tradition of painting, from which he also draws. Endowed with impressive creative force, his work incorporates a wide range of highly diverse cultural references: Baroque painting; American abstract expressionism; Italian arte povera; art brut. Artists such as Caravaggio, Velázquez, Rembrandt, Goya, Paul Klee, Jan Dubuffet, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró and Antoni Tàpies, are just some of the influences that have been transfigured by Barceló's overwhelming imagination, in an outstanding personal synthesis of strong material presence and immense plasticity.

Barceló uses a wide variety of, at times, unorthodox materials, both organic and inorganic. He has incorporated seaweed, food, milk, bleach, eggs and blood into his works. He has smoked paintings, drawn on paper eaten by termites and painted on canvases that have been crumpled or cut up using a chain saw. The tactile rapport with the materials he works with - clay, dyes, bark or pigments - reveal his passion for nature. Fish, octopuses, trees and goats... Barceló has a whole repertoire of hallmark iconography.

The exhibition

Museo Picasso Málaga will be showing ceramics, paintings, watercolours, artist's notebooks, mixed-media works on mulberry tree bark, and bronze sculptures. The central display comprises thirty ceramics that share sophisticatedly crude features, with lacerated, fragmented and pierced forms on which appear figurative elements that look like aquatic plants and creatures, or suggest tongues, petals, fins and leaves, occasionally with anthropomorphic features. As a whole, this group on display in the MPM exhibition provides a summary of the interests of an artist who, while never ceasing to paint, has explored the formal and conceptual possibilities of ceramics. These clay creations were produced in his studio workshop in Vilafranca de Bonany (Mallorca), as were his Totems, a new series of large-format ceramics made from superimposed blocks, that evoke Classical architecture, deities and mythological characters from an unknown civilization.

Miquel Barceló. Metamorphosis will also show a recent series of large format paintings, as well as some blue and black nocturnal landscapes, with stormy skies and full moons, that resonate with movement and light. There is also a self-portrait that looks as if it has been burnt, the result of scratching the black surface, and some paintings with reliefs of animals, in an allusion to cave paintings, that illustrate Barceló's belief that prehistory is just as modern as any other period of art history.

A keen reader, writer and connoisseur of the great works of world literature, the exhibition will also include, as reference material, illustrated books such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Faust and Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy, which Barceló illustrated for Galaxia Gutenberg, as well as Franz Kafka's La Métamorphose, which he illustrated for French publisher Gallimard. In fact, a series of fifteen gouaches that the artist based on this tale of a human being who turned into an insect will be shown alongside two other contemporary series of watercolours that he painted in Thailand and India, where he has travelled frequently over the past two years, and whose vibrant colours transport us to a special, idealized universe of myths and legends. These works depict characters who are sometimes from the animal kingdom, sometimes the plant kingdom, and in them the viewer can once again catch a glimpse of the seductive appeal of mutation. A selection of six travel logs from the artist's Asian journeys can also be seen in the exhibition.

A set of six large bronze sculptures representing some twisted and burnt used matches, will be installed in MPM's Renaissance courtyard. This has also occurred at previous exhibitions with works by Louise Bourgeois, Bruce Nauman and Alexander Calder. This will be the second time since the Prince exhibition in 2012 that a living contemporary artist has exhibited their work in the Málaga gallery.