

MANOLO VALDÉS

Las Meninas a San Marco

5 April – 15 June, 2024

Contini Art Gallery presents, in collaboration with the Municipality of Venice, Vela S.p.A. and the Superintendence of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the Municipality of Venice and the Lagoon, the exhibition "Las Meninas a San Marco" by the famous Spanish artist Manolo Valdés. In anticipation of the artistic ferment of the Biennale Arte 2024, the exhibition will be inaugurated – in the presence of the artist – on Friday, April 5, 2024, in Piazzetta San Marco, in the area facing the Doge's Palace, in the heart of the Venetian historic center.

Until June 15, 2024, twelve "Reina Mariana" and a monumental "Infanta Margarita" will be welcomed in the lagoon city, the iconic bronze sculptures that give plastic bodies to the famous portraits representing Maria Anna of Austria and Margherita Maria Teresa of Habsburg, and the monumental "Mariposas" and "Diadema" sculptures.

The Master, who has been collaborating with the Contini Art Gallery since 2016, has always shown a deep sensitivity in decontextualizing subjects from famous works of the caliber of Velázquez, Picasso, and Matisse to transport them into a sculptural three-dimensionality and thus giving them a new identity, a vitality unknown to the original inspiration. After the success achieved at the famous Salone della Meridiana of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples last winter, and previously in the historic Alpemare in Forte dei Marmi during the summer of 2023, the "Reina Mariana" and "Infanta Margarita" will now encounter *en plain air* the international public of the beautiful Venetian square. At the end of the exhibition, one of the "Reina Mariana" sculptures will be donated to the City of Venice. Valdés explains that he began to work on the image of the "Reina Mariana" by painting it in the first place. The Prado Museum in Madrid has always been one of the artist's favorite exhibition places, in whose rooms he loved to take inspiration and admire the masterpieces of the Spanish master Velázquez. While sketching the first lines of the female figure to create engravings, he began to question how he could view it from a different perspective. Thus, the artist creates the first sculptural version in wood. The aim was to expand and explore the narrative of this figure beyond the limits imposed by the two-dimensionality of the canvas. From wood to bronze, from stone to resin: Valdés has relentlessly returned to the theme of "Las Meninas", always drawing new inspiration for the experimentation of different materials and techniques.

Not far from the *Piazzetta*, along the Riva Ca' di Dio overlooking the San Marco basin, in a flowing path towards the Arsenale and the Boat Show, the monumental sculpture "Mariposas" will be located to propose one of the recurring motifs in Valdés' poetics, oftentimes used as a pretext for his artistic investigation: a stylized head on which a multitude of butterflies swirl.

"I've been working a lot with butterflies lately. One day in Central Park I saw butterflies fluttering over a person's head. This inspired me! From that moment on I saw butterflies everywhere" – says the artist.

On the occasion of the Boat Show at the Arsenale in Venice, you can also admire the monumental sculpture "Diadema": composed of monumental volutes that frame the stylized face placed at the center of the composition, which constitutes the central nucleus of the work.

In the unique context of the city of Venice, the exhibition "Las Meninas a San Marco", it will offer a stimulating overview of the multiform sculptural experiments of one of the greatest exponents of the contemporary international art scene. The exhibition "Las Meninas a San Marco" has been created also thanks to the support of Banca Ifis, Assicurazioni Generali, and media partner Gruppo Editoria Italia. Banca Ifis, chaired by Ernesto Fürstenberg Fassio, indeed cultivates a deep relationship with art that leads the bank to support projects and initiatives on the Venetian territory and beyond. In this context, the next spring the Bank will inaugurate the International Sculpture Park, a garden of twenty-two hectares within its headquarters in Marocco (VE), that will be open to the public to enjoy the vision of some of the works of monumental contemporary sculpture, including one by Manolo Valdés himself. The Bank is also a sponsor of the Italian Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale.

Biography

Manolo Valdés was born in Valencia, Spain, in 1942. An apprentice painter already at the age of 15, he attended the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts in Valencia. In 1962 he participated in the National Exhibition of Fine Arts, presenting the work Barca (now at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia) in which the constant elements of his paintings are already evident: the figurative theme and the informal use of matter. However, during the years of study, on the occasion of a trip to Paris, he discovered the visual and artistic freedom of Pierre Soulages and Robert Rauschenberg. He began his career, moving the first steps towards the co-foundation of the group Equipo Crónica, in 1964, a pioneering collective of Spanish Pop Art where, together with Juan Antonio Toledo and Rafael Solbes, he was able to combine creative experimentation and political criticism. After this experience, which lasted until 1981, he began to hold his personal exhibitions. He focuses especially on the reinterpretation of artistic and historical themes without provocative references, with the creation of his own creative universe through inspiration combined with the study of materials. Winner, among many, of the Premio Nacional de Bellas Artes Espana, his creations have been the subject of numerous national and international exhibitions. In 2007 he was also awarded the title of Officer of the Order of Merit by the President of the French Republic. Manolo Valdés' works can be found in numerous public and private collections, including: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre George Pompidou, Paris; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain; Fundación of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain; Istituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Centre Julio Gonzalez, Valencia, Spain; Kunstmuseum, Berlin, Germany; Veranneman Foundation, Kruishoutem, Belgium; National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China; Les Terrasses du Casino, Monte Carlo, Monaco, and many more.

He currently lives and works in New York. Since 2016 he has been collaborating with the Contini Art Gallery, which represents him exclusively for Italy.

Vernissage: Piazzetta San Marco (Gran Caffè Chioggia), Friday 5 April 2024 – 6.30 PM, in the presence of the artist

Catalog with the text by Kosme de Barañano

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