

LISSON GALLERY

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Press Release

Pedro Reyes

Glyptotek

2 March – 21 April 2018
27 Bell Street, London

For his first London exhibition since the acclaimed ‘Disarm’ in 2013, Pedro Reyes returns with a fictional, pan-historical museum of sculpture, or a *glyptotek*, from the ancient Greek term for a cache of classic statuary. As well as a meditation on art history, these works explore both figurative and abstract approaches to sculpture, through materials including volcanic stone, marble, bronze and steel and through series such as *The Protesters*, of which the artist has stated:

“Most statues commemorate an historical event, or the life of an influential person... Given the current political climate, I envisioned the anonymous protester as the incarnation of a contemporary hero, taking to the streets as an act of resistance.”

Among the images of revolt is the sculptural duo of *Versus Machina* (all works 2017-18), in which a female figure impales a robot with a spear, perhaps echoing the pose of St George vanquishing a dragon or antiquity’s dynamic ensemble of Laocoön and his sons. This vision of humanity fighting a machine is connected to a course Reyes taught at MIT, entitled *The Reverse Engineering of Warfare: Challenging Techno-optimism and Reimagining the Defence Sector*, in which he criticised the systemic belief that all problems can be solved with technology. Cast in bronze from a concrete original, *Versus Machina* also bears the scars of real damage, incurred during Mexico’s earthquake of September 2017, for which Reyes returned to his architectural training to help a rapid response team of 100 architects shoring up buildings under the banner of ReConstruir México.

A number of stacked towers and interlocking sculptures continue Reyes’s use of totemic forms, exploring not only geometry and abstraction, but also the legacy of Modernism, in works such as *El quinto sol [The Fifth Sun]*. These are complemented or contrasted with bust-like lava stone carvings influenced by pre-Columbian forms, Olmec heads and post-revolutionary Mexican statues, distilled down to works such as *Calavera [Skull]*, and *Encounter*. Two other works, *Seer*, and *Jaguar*, are sculptural representations of synaesthesia: an eye emerging out of a mouth, and its opposite, a tongue emerging out of an eye.

Finally, this sculptural gathering is foregrounded by a series of friezes running behind; three-dimensional wall reliefs that act as a coda to many of Reyes’s current concerns. Along this polyphonic array are a babble of speech bubbles (relating to a suite of social sculptures entitled *Colloquium*); a computer keyboard and a man on a bicycle that recalls pictograms from the 1968 Mexico Olympics, as well as an on-going project in which Reyes travels around on a pedal-powered food cart promoting an insect-based source of protein. This show, presented in an accompanying booklet, includes not only the objects needed to populate an encyclopaedic ‘Glyptotek’, but an array of symbols and glyphs that constitute part of Reyes’s rich and ever-growing iconography, which has itself been surveyed in a new book ‘Ad Usum/To Be Used’, published by Harvard University Press.

About Pedro Reyes

Pedro Reyes has won international attention for large-scale projects that address current social and political issues. Through a varied practice utilizing sculpture, performance, video, and activism, Reyes explores the power of individual and collective organization to incite change through communication, creativity, happiness, and humour.

A socio-political critique of contemporary gun culture is addressed in Reyes's *Palas por Pistolas* (2008), in which the artist worked with local authorities in Culiacán, Mexico, to melt down guns into shovels, intended to plant trees in cities elsewhere in the world. Similarly, in *Disarm* (2013) the Mexican government donated over 6,700 confiscated firearms for Reyes to transform into mechanical musical instruments, which are automated to play a delightful, if surreal loop, retaining the raw emotion of their origination.

Issues of community and compassion were addressed in 'Sanatorium', activated at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2011, dOCUMENTA (13) in Germany in 2012, and in 2014 at The Power Plant in Toronto and The Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami. In this work, visitors were invited to sign up for a 'temporary clinic,' with the mission of treating various kinds of urban malaise. In 2016, Reyes presented 'Doomocracy' in the Brooklyn Army Terminal in New York. Organised by Creative Time, this "political house of horrors" was an immersive exhibition marking the confluence of two events haunting the American cultural imagination at the time: Halloween and the 2016 presidential election. Presented in the form of a haunted house, visitors navigated a labyrinth of rooms to explore the complexities of political anxiety, with the intention of fostering dialogue around the contentious state of global politics.

Reyes (b. 1972) lives and works in Mexico City. He studied architecture at the Ibero-American University in Mexico City. Solo exhibitions include Creative Time, New York, USA (2016); Dallas Contemporary, Texas, USA (2016); La Tallera, Cuernavaca, Mexico (2016); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2015); ICA, Miami, FL, USA (2014); The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada (2014); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA (2011); Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA (2011); CCA Kitakyushu, Japan (2009) and San Francisco Art Institute, CA, USA (2008). Group exhibitions include 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan (2015); The National Museum of XXI Century Arts (MAXXI), Rome, Italy (2015); Beijing Biennale, China (2014); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2013); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany (2012); Liverpool Biennial, UK (2012); Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2012) and the 50th Venice Biennale, Italy (2003). In 2016, Reyes was the inaugural Dasha Zhukova Distinguished Visiting Artist at MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (CAST) at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 58 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Richard Long, before introducing a generation of significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. In addition to a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation, the gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller and Tatsuo Miyajima. It is also responsible for raising the profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza and Wael Shawky.

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