

Mikel Adán Tolosa

Perquè m'agrada viure aquí

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The project presented by Mikel Adán Tolosa at La Capella's Espai Rampa stems from a minor episode in the artistic biography of the sculptor Manolo Hugué (1872-1945). In his youth, Hugué produced a number of sculptures, now lost, that were unique because they were made of butter, displayed as advertising for a butter factory. The lack of documentary evidence attesting to what Hugué represented, and how he did so, has made these unusual sculptures the subject of speculation. Although they were undeniably never made in order to be permanent, it cannot be determined whether their ephemeral nature stimulated Hugué to develop novel formal solutions, or whether, on the contrary, it reinforced his use of materials such as stone or terracotta, which characterised his later work under the precepts of Noucentisme. Perhaps for this very reason, given that the initial impulse behind *Perquè m'agrada viure aquí* (*Because I Like Living Here*) is an event for which there is neither material evidence nor verifiable facts, Mikel Adán Tolosa's exhibition is more speculative in nature rather than programmatic or affirmative.

Its initial premise is apparently simple: to make two contrasting materials, stone and butter, coexist. On the one hand, stone, like clay or bronze, is a material that belongs to the classical languages of sculpture, and, when worked, it requires issues such as weight and gravity to be taken into account. 'I understand sculpture as a reconciliation between form and weight, between form and gravity, between form and material,' the artist explained. 'If gravity dominates too much, the work can seem rigid, while if the weight of the material is ignored and only the form is considered, it can seem too unreal. Sculpture for me is about positioning oneself between a physical and an aesthetic reality.'

But just as Mikel Adán Tolosa challenges formal traditions and well-established procedures by working with stone, he does so again by incorporating butter, in the knowledge that it is a material without disciplinary affiliation that is both unconventional and uncooperative: the material becomes a *problem*. Despite its exceptional malleability and flexibility, butter is considered a sculpturally elusive material because it reacts directly to environmental conditions, considerably complicating its modelling. Consequently, when using it to make a sculpture, a number of preventive conservation measures must be taken into account to offer the necessary guarantees for its durability. In the case concerning us here, the artist has developed a system of refrigerated pedestals with Huaqian Zhang that maintain a stable temperature to prevent the once sculpted pieces from softening and thereby melting completely.

Nevertheless, despite its instability, butter possesses a set of properties that lend sculpture unique qualities. Consider, for example, how the notions of historicity or archaeological time, which are inseparable from classical statuary, are instead difficult to transfer to a block of butter. Conversely, its palatable, unctuous and lubricating qualities contrast with the bland, abrasive texture of rock.

Rather than being constructed as a dialogue, the exhibition is a study of contrast between materiality. By considering the limitations and qualities of one and the other, the artist lays the groundwork for an inquiry into the processes that lead to recording a form. Thus, in the context of the exhibition, despite their differences in terms of weight, consistency or olfactory qualities, stone and butter are presented as serving similar representations.

The models from which Mikel Adán Tolosa draws inspiration to develop each of his pieces are examples of plant species endemic to or ‘extremely localised’ in Catalan territory. The artist nonetheless refrains from making a detailed morphological description of them and decides to question the notions of suitability, fidelity and concordance among his models and chosen representational procedures. By identifying these models within a defined geographical area, the artist imbues the flowers with a complex, almost allegorical function when it comes to their meaning. Some of these species are currently in the process of disappearing, so by transforming them into a motif – both stony and malleable – they simultaneously express a desire for permanence and a perishable nature. But through their materiality, these flowers also allude to the dynamics of mineral extraction and industrial exploitation that systematically transform the Earth’s crust, or to milk from ruminants in perfectly cut blocks, ready for consummation.

Perquè m’agrada viure aquí raises a procedural question: what influence does materiality have on representation? But above all, how can the logic of correctness be replaced by awareness of the material and the limitations imposed by it? Similarly, the exhibition also questions how a sculpture is affected by the place where it is displayed. During the run of the exhibition, several restaurants and food establishments will display one of the artist’s butter sculptures at his request. Here, however, the advertising impetus that motivated Hugué’s commission is replaced by the disinterested stewardship of an artistic object, allowing the flowers to disseminate.

It all forms part of a rematerialisation, providing a better understanding of the structures required to sustain a form over time. The purpose is by no means to preserve it in perpetuity, but rather to make this form, the sculpture, a negotiable and patient entity that respects the memory of touch and receives an image through touch while also knowing how to let go of it.

Marc Navarro

Curatorial team

Design, engineering and production of refrigerated pedestals:
Huaqian Zhang

Handrail lettering design:
Martí Aguilar

Partner shops:
La Ribera, Bar Mendizábal and Patisserie Brunell

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