



The exhibition *Miquel Barceló. Noah's Ark* is part of the acts to commemorate the 8<sup>th</sup> Centenary of the University of Salamanca. It shows approximately 80 works by this artist from Majorca which were made with different techniques: painting, sculpture, ceramic, works on paper and performance, most of which were created in the last six years. This exhibition shows the constant changeableness of Barceló, whose vast oeuvre is characterized by a surprising formal and iconographic richness. The emphasis on the process of creation of the pieces and on metalinguistic reflection is a defining trait of his most recent works. In these last years, Barceló has simultaneously developed different series of paintings. The exhibition in Salamanca has been designed by taking into account the different spaces it would occupy within the University and the city itself. Many of the pieces in this exhibition have never been shown before.

The exhibition has been curated by Enrique Juncosa, an expert on his work, and it is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with all the works in the exhibition, plus a text from the curator and another one by American poet and critic John Yau.

### Patio de Escuelas Exhibition Hall

This space shows the oldest pieces of the exhibition. They are 26 watercolours which belong to the series created by Barceló to illustrate Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* from 2001 to 2003. The *Divine Comedy*, which is considered one of the most outstanding works of universal literature, was written at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The poem tells the story of Dante's journey to Hell and Purgatory, accompanied by Virgil, the great Roman poet, who symbolizes reason. Finally, Dante arrives in Paradise, this time accompanied by Beatrice, who represents faith. The style is different in the three parts of the poem. In "Hell", Dante uses many vulgar expressions, whereas in "Purgatory" he cites biblical quotes, and in "Heaven" he adds hymns and songs. Similarly, in Barceló's "Hell" there is a predominance of black and dark colours, apart from images of monsters and torments; in "Purgatory", a transition space of atonement and purification, there are journeys by boat or images of groups of people crossing plains and mountains. The environment is still hostile, although increasingly lighter. And finally, "Heaven" is inhabited by figures with a halo over their heads, in positions which are predominantly static. There are areas of sky-blue colour occupied by ambiguous bright shapes which represent the ineffable. All the illustrations tend to have a mythical, oneiric or fantastic quality.

The number three, a symbol in the *Divine Comedy* and in different religions, is also the theme of the only painting on parchment *Autoportrait multiple à Padoum* (Multiple self-portrait in Padum) (2013), shown in this same hall. In this work we can see, painted in gold, a triple self-portrait of the artist seen from the front and his two opposing profiles. This same triple image is repeated three times in an ascending structure in which the figures reduce their size and create a sort of tower which reminds us of the Hinduist and Buddhist sculptures and paintings in which deities are represented with multiple heads and arms in static images





of movement, which are in turn beatific visions. Barceló travelled through the Himalayas in the summers of 2009 and 2010. On the other hand, there are similar representations in the West, such as Titian's *The Allegory of Age Governed by Prudence* (c. 1565).

### **Hospedería Fonseca Exhibition Hall**

This hall shows an important group of large-format paintings and pieces on paper created from 2009 to 2016. They are divided into still lifes, white paintings, paintings of the seabed with bright shapes that suggest the shape of abyssal creatures, and relief paintings of heads of animals.

The large still lifes depict fruits, vegetables and flowers, sometimes in the shape of garlands, floating over monochrome surfaces of different materials. Because of their size, these still lifes become real idealised landscapes in which the painter, rather than marvelling at the small and daily things in life, treats his theme with a heroic or epic discourse.

The white paintings are the largest group of works by Barceló in the last years. They are pieces with an abstract look, although their titles connect them to specific themes, such as sea waves and their white foam, bullrings, volcanoes or town squares. Barceló has also made similar matter paintings in which there is a predominance of other colours, such as red and blue, which suggest images of stars and planets. Barceló's white paintings remind us of the work of Robert Ryman, the American minimalist painter who only used white. Also, these are works about physical processes; the images are shaped depending on the density of the painting and the way in which it is applied on the canvas. The ultimate theme of these pieces is their texture, the illustration of the behaviour of matter, its drying process or the incidence of light over them. Barceló's work, unlike that of minimalists and their theories about a possible purity of art, pursues the idea of complexity.



Already in the nineties, Barceló created pieces in relief in which the canvas was distorted before it was painted by placing it over irregular surfaces and soaking it in starch. These works are a reference to cave paintings, whose authors often took advantage of the relief, shapes and markings of the surfaces of the rocky walls of the caves in which they worked. The famous Chauvet cave was discovered in 1994 in the south of France, right at the time at which Barceló was painting his pieces in relief. Barceló has painted pieces like *Fòssils mirant a dreta* (Fossils looking to their right) (2014), which are directly related to the paintings in Chauvet. The same could be said, although no longer in a literal sense, of the entire set of more recent paintings and paper pieces in the exhibition, such as *Parietal amb banyes* (Parietal with horns) or *Peinture pariétale sur toile* (Parietal painting on canvas) (both from 2015). There we can see, painted on canvas or paper with relief, heads of different animals—particularly horses, bulls and goats—which seem to have been inspired by the reliefs.

Another recent series of works by Barceló is made up of a group of paintings with intense green or blue tones, such as *Piscifactoria abandonada* (Abandoned fish farm) or *Oblada* (Oblade), both from 2015. These pieces show images of cephalopods, fish or made-up abyssal creatures that emerge as flashes of light over a viscous and dark background made up of different materials. The evanescence of images is one of the main themes in these paintings, as well as the appearance of an image from the viscosity of matter, which is turned into light here, thus underlining the metaphorical possibilities of coming closer to the ineffable.

### **Chapel of the Arzobispo Fonseca Residence Hall**

This space features *Noah's Ark* (2014), the monumental 4 x 6 m painting which gives its name to the exhibition and which is first shown to the public here. The piece belongs to that group of still lifes/landscapes exhibited in the Hospedería Fonseca Hall,

although due to its large size, it is located in the crossing of the Chapel. Noah, as we know, was warned by God of the arrival of a devastating Flood, and he built an ark to save himself and his family, together with two of each kind of beast. In Barceló's painting we can see pairs of vegetables and fruits and also, drawn in graphite, heads of birds and beasts. The title may seem ironic, and also having such an epic scale for a still life, but it is really a metaphor of permanence beyond death which at the same time underlines the transient nature of everything.

Also in the Chapel, there is a set of 18 ceramic pieces created from 2012 to 2016, except for one from 2009, which means that many of them are shown here for the first time. Barceló's ceramics are real sculptures, in spite of the fact that they sometimes conform to traditional shapes of vases, dishes or bricks, and that they are pierced, cracked, squashed, dented or bent, and finished with layers of different colours. The technique of ceramic also takes us back to the origins of art in ancient civilizations, and its transition through the kiln has an element of alchemy and magic in it. Barceló's first ceramics were created in 1995. Since then, ceramic has become one of the most important aspects of his work, so much so that the artist declared: "ceramic is a form of painting".

Some of the works shown here are almost as tall as we are, such as *Animals de cap fort* (Hard-headed animals) or *Siddharta* (both from 2012). This last piece reminds us of his travels to the Himalayas. In tantric Tibetan art there are often images of torn and eviscerated animals. Some other ceramics are flat, similar to plates or salvers, and remind us of the orifices in the body. There are also ironic ceramic pieces, such as *Família* (Family) (2015), in which a long red figure goes through five vases, creating a sort of skewer; or *Cossiòl amb flor vermella* (Flowerpot with red flower) (2012), in which the stem of the red flower mentioned in the title is a tower of bricks crowned by a reddish tongue. In *Roser* (Rosebush) (2012), the roses are made of pleated clay to suggest the petals of





roses, and then they are glued to different parts of a vase with the thorny stalk of a plant has been painted to bring them together.

### **Courtyard of the Anaya Palace**

The exhibition is completed with several monumental sculptures created from 2008 to 2015, and shown in different spaces of the city. The most recent one, *Le grand écouteur* (2015), which has just been finished in a workshop in Belgium, has been placed in the courtyard of the Anaya Palace. The piece is made with milled polyurethane and other materials which give it lightness. In it, the artist goes back to a theme he tackled before with smaller ceramics in which flower pots seem to be squashed and piled upon each other, thus illustrating the processes which originate them. Here, one of the flowerpot-shaped sculptures is bent until it creates something similar to a giant ear, which is where its title comes from. This work reminds us somehow of the famous melting clocks of Salvador Dalí.

### **Main Square**

*Gran Elefantdret* (2008) is located in the Main Square. This is a new version of a previous, smaller sculpture with a darker finish, and it shows an elephant which seems to be balanced over its trunk with some difficulty. In this new version, shown here for the first time, the animal has a whitish patina and expels white smoke for a long time through its anus. As in the case of *Le grand écouteur*, this piece satirizes the concept of public sculpture by including an element of humour with images that look for an immediate understanding of the pieces.

### **Patio de Escuelas Menores**

*14 Allumettes* (2015), located on the courtyard of the Escuelas Menores, is a coppice of spent matches, created in bronze and in different sizes, in which the tallest ones are over 3 m high. As in



the case of still lifes, the theme of these pieces is the transient nature of everything, with the example of the matches, whose life, once that they are lit, only lasts for an instant. The theme of matches had already been explored in some paintings from 2006, which showed them scattered around white landscapes with large skulls. This work is made up of 13 sculptures, because one of them is a double piece.

### Courtyard of the Arzobispo Fonseca Residence Hall

The exhibition includes a performance, in *La imagen fantasma* (The phantom image) (2016), which which was first shown at the Musée Picasso in Paris and has now been adapted to the courtyard of the Arzobispo Fonseca Residence Hall. This piece, created in collaboration with French musician Pascal Comelade and with the intervention of Iván Telefunken in its interpretation, will take place during the inauguration of the exhibition. During the performance, Barceló creates a great painting with water which will vanish shortly after.

### Credits

*Illustration for Divina Comedia, Paraíso, Dante Alighieri*  
(*Círculo de Lectores*, 2003), 2002  
Watercolour on paper, 55 x 40 cm  
Artist's collection  
Photography: Galaxia Gutenberg  
© Miquel Barceló, VEGAP,  
Salamanca, 2017  
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*Autoportrait multiple à Padoum*  
(Multiple self-portrait in Padum), 2013  
Mixed media on parchment,  
113 x 80 cm  
Private collection  
Photography: André Morin  
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*Parietal amb banyes*  
(Parietal with horns), 2015  
Mixed media on canvas,  
206 x 253 x 10 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger &  
Tobias Mueller Modern Art, Switzerland  
Photography: Galerie Bischofberger  
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**pp. 6-7**

*El Arca de Noé, (Noah's Ark), 2014*  
Mixed media on canvas,  
401 x 602 cm  
Private collection  
Photography: Agustí Torres  
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**pp. 10-11**

*Roser (Rosebush), 2012*  
Ceramic, 141 x 99 x 67.5 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger &  
Tobias Mueller Modern Art, Switzerland  
Photography: Gary Kammerhuber  
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*Le grand écouteur*  
(The big earphone), 2015  
Milled PU, mixed media and gel coat,  
567 x 298 x 403 cm  
Courtesy of the artist  
Photography: Erik & Petra Hesmerg  
© Miquel Barceló, VEGAP,  
Salamanca, 2017  
**pp. 14-15**

# Miquel Barceló

## El Arca de Noé

28.04—01.10.2017

Universidad de Salamanca

Capilla del Colegio Arzobispo Fonseca c/ Fonseca, 4

Sala de exposiciones Hospedería Fonseca c/ Fonseca, 2

Sala de Exposiciones Patio de Escuelas Patio de Escuelas Menores, s/n

Palacio de Anaya Plaza de Anaya, s/n

Plaza Mayor

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