



## Alejandra Coello from Portugal

### Impressions of a day with Ciriza

It's ten thirty in the morning on a sunny Wednesday in March. Traveling on a train to Pamplona, the wheels begin to move and take speed, leaving behind the Atocha station.

If not for the movement of the landscape on the other side of my window, there is nothing to indicate that indeed I am moving forward. Such is the silence and calm.

As time passes and I continue the journey, the sky changes and the sun eventually recedes behind the clouds. Upon arriving at my destination, a slight drizzle begins.

The purpose for my trip is to visit the studio of Carlos Ciriza. We met some time ago, and I am familiar with his work, but this is the first occasion that I have to see the place where his work originates. I exit the train, and over there is Ciriza, waiting patiently despite my delay. My stay in Pamplona will not last more than a day, so as there is no time to lose and much to see, we get in his green van. Already inside the van, his cell phone rings from the pocket of his coat, but as he reaches it, his hand encounters a pacifier instead. Surprised, he smiles and is reminded of the owner of the pacifier, the youngest of his six children.

Upon entering the city, we leave the van and walk through the streets. Ciriza speaks of the changes that have taken place here recently. He proudly shows me the works he has done and how they have contributed to the beautification of the city. I spend hours in his company, leaving me submerged in the illusion and the energy with which he absorbs everything that happens around him. His gaze always fresh is capable of being surprised by even the most mundane things, such as finding a pacifier in the pocket of his coat. That surprise, curiosity and contemplation, are determining factors in understanding the work of Carlos



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Ciriza. But the time has not yet come to discuss his sculptures. First, we will pass by his house on the outskirts of the city, a big house capable of hosting a large family and all his loved ones. As the landscape that surrounds it, the house is full of life and open to anybody that visits it. The house contains all kinds of entertainment for children and has a wonderful view over valleys surrounded by mountains, with a meandering river and a garden full of fruit. In this garden, there is also room for surprises, and if one sharpens their eye and the rest of their senses, one can discover all the richness that it encompasses. Following the profiles of the bushes, one can guess they form a dragon and if one enters into the garden, one can find hidden corners and fountains that break the silence with a gentle movement of the water.

In the silence, we find another of the important factors in the creative process of this artist. In the course of our conversations throughout the day, there are numerous occasions when I see this silence as an important value for him. He is looking for it and enjoys it with all senses.

### **The artist's workshop: a trip through the creative process**

The next step of my visit brings me to his workshop; a large place, with high ceilings and enough space to accommodate big sculptures, all of which are protected under white sheets. A soft light enters sideways and illuminates the entire workshop embracing the sculptures and enlightening the free and displaced forms. Upon entering, I have the sensation of entering a sacred space, perhaps due to the silence, the indirect light, or the mysterious shapes hidden under the sheets. Perhaps, it is the creative energy that beats in every artist's workshop dedicated fully to their profession, but the fact is that it is here where I find the keys that unlock the creativity of Carlos Ciriza. On my visit I knew Pamplona, its architecture, its landscape, its food, as well as the noble, fresh and open character of its inhabitants. Of course there is much to learn to understand what feeds the spirit of the sculptor, but at the workshop I witnessed all the



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influences purified at its maximum level searching for meaning through an altered medium.

And the journey through this little cosmos goes from the origin of the creative process until the final product. At the entrance of the room hung banners from exhibitions at various locations inside and outside Spain, which depicts Ciriza's international projection and the scope of his artwork worldwide. As we move through the workshop, divided into three areas connected to one another, I see his sculptures. Some of them, as I said before, are completed and protected under white sheets. Others, by contrast, are in the process of creation and transformation. In this laboratory for experimentation that is his workshop, there are pieces completed in form, however, they lack the final touch before being exposed or transplanted to the destination for which they were conceived. This process takes months, during which the pieces lie lethargically, while the surface of weathering (COR-TEN) steel or slate undergoes a chemical transformation through water and air, until reaching the desired effect by the artist. This process subsequently protects the sculptures from adverse weather. But once deployed these agents: the sun, wind, rain, along with the passage of time, will continue to work on them throughout the years, embellishing even more, and gradually integrating the sculptures into the environment where they were permanently installed. In this way, each individual piece is an organic entity, constantly changing. As is often said in reference to the painting: "time also paints", and in the case of the sculpture - due to their constant exposure - all paint: water, air, light ...

But in the process of transformation on the surface of the subject, the artist does not always have a preconceived and clear idea of the outcome of the experiment. This is an ongoing search, combined with patience and curiosity, and open to the surprise from which the different materials transforms to. Thus, a dialogue is established, a form of collaboration between the designer and his work, which without doubt, drives the final product to exceed the artist's expectation. And as I said before, that time - in its definition, meteorological and succession of instants



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- also "paint", in this case we can say that the material "talks". Ciriza gives that freedom to the material. There is communication and space between the artist and his work. Ciriza opens his hand so that the pieces are developed freely. He is a creator who respects the sublime dimension of his own work. I would compare this relationship to the work of educating, in which case the teacher sets the basic guidelines for the children and shows them the way. But the final product, what they are and what they would become always exceeds and outweighs the creator. But this occurs if the creator knows how to see the original qualities and allows them to grow.

It will happen if the artist is able to work with humility, honesty and for himself. And here is where I find one of the main qualities that make up the work of Carlos Ciriza. He is an honest artist, accountable and respectful of his work.

But before I elaborate further on the work of the artist, I will continue with my visit to his workshop. To do this you need to climb to the upper floor of the workshop, which functions metaphorically as the body of the artist. It is an ascent to the heart and the head of the sculptor. Up there, there is a fundamental place, a small room separated from the studio. It is the only single space, separated from the rest by a door. An enclosed and intimate space in which the artist conceived and carried out the first drafts of his works: the place where ideas emerge and take their first form. In this small room an apparent chaos reigns, and my eyes receive the impact of impressions and information, which needed a careful second look to understand what happens there. Slowly my eyes turn to face the paintings and finished drawings, preparatory sketches, pieces of slate, all kinds of materials, papers and photographs. I find myself in the place where Ciriza designed his sculptures, and at this early stage, the design plays a key role. As the artist himself has already stated on many occasions, in his artistic production, painting and sculpture are inseparable, and since that forms one body, one factor definitely affects the other.

The apparent chaos that reigns in the room is made up of countless objects, souvenirs, pieces that speak of countless working hours, experiments, tests, and



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projects in all its stages. Some have long to wait their turn, others are in full swing. But what finally emerges to be turned into sculpture is similar to a perfume, a synthesis that makes up the imagination of the artist. And there lies the wonderful thing about art because we all have a small workshop in our heads full of memories, impressions, obsessions, why not? - but very few manage to develop them and clean up the random substance until forming the art piece. In my opinion, Ciriza succeeds in his work; every piece of his works conveys the power and the energy of the elements that comprise them.

**Two fundamental values to understand the work of Ciriza: time and silence.**

However, to convey his message, his energy, parts of the pieces encounter an obstacle, a gap between the work piece and the general public. What type of gap? I will explain below.

As I mentioned earlier, silence is an important factor to understand Ciriza's art pieces. Only in silence and contemplation is it possible to have deep reflection. Without doubt, his art pieces are the product of silence. This is evident in the pattern of departure that emerges and is shared by all of them. In its current stage, Ciriza departs in most cases, either from a prism of four vertical sides, from a horizontal and elevated platform, or from a plane that leans against the wall in relief, which the artist resolves in different ways in each case. This scheme provides at first glance, a common look. And this is precisely the obstacle that art work faces in communication with the viewer. If one does not give themselves the necessary time to observe and understand the art pieces, one may judge them equally and not appreciate them. It is in any case an obstacle that does not belong to the work. The difficulty in capturing the message and its strength that the artworks convey lies ultimately in the sufficient time and sensitivity in the sight.

But we live in a time and a society where too much visual information attacks us daily. We are accustomed to brief and direct impacts. We demand always





something new, original, and different from anything we've seen before. And if the "original" is offered to us, we spend a second of our attention, and then ignore it moving our attention on the next novelty. The concepts that Ciriza uses are not dischargable. Quite the contrary, his concepts utilize and cover all the possibilities that every design may offer. Ciriza accomplishes this task by recreating each profile, partition and movement that make up the pieces. It is obvious that Ciriza enjoys experimenting with shadows and illuminated areas. These levels of light and shade also provide a rich variety of color as a result of the dislocation of pieces of weathering steel.

The varying shades of color are a result of the placement and shape of each piece in conjunction with the interacting light. (This is easy to appreciate having any of the images that are offered in the book). Ciriza takes time to look. It is a soft and long gaze, sensitive to every little detail. It is often a deep and progressive loop, which also requires the hands because there are things that do not reach the eyes. If the viewer is to overcome the obstacle of perceiving a common look in "similar" art pieces, the viewer would reveal an unlimited number of messages conveyed in the artwork. With the same language one creates endless messages. Normally, artworks produced on time and in silence allowing the soul to speak, also require time and silence on our part to embrace and understand them in full. If we do not give ourselves that time, the energy of the artwork does not reach us and we lose all its richness. Something similar happens with poetry, with classical music and with so many other artistic expressions - even with the knowledge of people. Van Gogh said "there is nothing more truly artistic than people who love others". In any case, this lack of time and silence is also the reason that some who see the work of Ciriza immediately identified his work with other artists such as Chillida or Oteiza. Although, they appear to have common approaches, beyond some generalities, Ciriza's art work is unique. Assuming the difficulty in capturing the message that an art piece holds, I accept





that some are left without enjoying them. I personally feel that in his integrity as a sculptor, true to himself and his work, his sculptures have magnificence, moral and intellectual greatness, and an unlimited range.

### **Analysis of the artwork. The artist's eye: a return to basics**

Thanks to the eyes of Ciriza, to his ability to translate his works in what barely is perceptible by the senses, his art pieces save us. If only during the time that we contemplate the artwork, these pieces save us from fashions, from the superfluous, from the explosive bottomless messages, from the short events and the feeling of emptiness that accompanies it. Our eyes rest on the contemplation of their simple and strong forms, slowly caressing the surface of the pieces trying to mentally rebuild the initial volume, seamlessly. We contemplate the interior of the pieces, through the holes left by displaced forms, and we stand there with the light and air, which came before us and play hide and seek like when we were kids.

Personally, I can not avoid relating Ciriza's art pieces with the pleasures of childhood. The irregular profiles and smooth surfaces of the art pieces bring back memories of ceramic lessons, in which we played with clay and we used a wire to separate the pieces. The profiles that were cut with that thread in contact with the mud were similar.

Despite its simplicity, or precisely because of it, the art pieces of Carlos Ciriza arouse all sorts of associations and help us discover our own imagination. On the contrary, when working with figurative forms our eyes would see only an animal, person or anyone who would have been the subject chosen by the artist. However Carlos Ciriza invites us to look with the "internal" eyes of the heart, memory, and the soul. These "internal" eyes have the quality to see beyond. With them we rely on the form and matter, but only to take momentum and make the jump to more profound aesthetic experience. These experiences will gain in depth and impact, as long as we learn to observe its simplicity. How many times can we not see beauty because it is too close? Or



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because it is apparently obvious? In this sense, Ciriza does not take anything for granted. He begins with truly simple forms stripped of any element or decorative accessory, and devotes all the efforts to unravel the hidden beauty of his artwork. One can say that his work is an exercise of essentialism. To do so, at this stage that now runs as creative, the artist breaks the unity of the matter. But not at random, his artworks respond to previous designs which he studies all possibilities prior molding the piece. Of course, to study all possibilities would be an endless job. In this way Ciriza is able to raise the most interesting possibilities to him and is able to recreate himself in every transformation of the original form: the movement of each piece, the different volumes, their dimensions and forms, the texture of its surface, the gaps created by displacement and the resulting sets of lights and shadows. In this way, his hand allows us to discover the infinite possibilities that are home to basic forms. Establishing a literary parallel, this condensation of information with few resources and their consequent exposure in simple terms reminds me of the Japanese haiku. A form of poetry consisting of 17 syllables, divided into three verses, as the example that follows: Old pond A frog jumps Sound of water As in the haiku, the work of Ciriza finds one of his key influences through nature, obviously not from a formal point of view, but from the point of view of the constantly changing scenery due to the passage of time and the natural attraction and synergy between the forms. Let's see how.

In the example of haiku, I propose it describes a simple, everyday environment of a pond, which normally one would not pay much attention to. However, the poet has recreated the mood of the pond by describing the frog, the leap that it makes, and even the sound produced by breaking the stillness of the water surface. By concentrating on this, so seemingly small, haiku acts as a zoom camera, ignoring everything else that surrounds it and giving full importance to the three facts. Similarly, the sculptures of Ciriza function as a zoom on a seemingly fact as irrelevant as the movement of a body, its partition and the creation of a new form. Regarding the passage of time, it is present in his work



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from the time that a movement has taken place. There is a before, in the manner that was complete and united, and a later in the vacuum that appears as a new component of the work. But not only is there a before and later; in the case of horizontal platforms when the fragments are separated from the original form, they appear to be suspended in the air. Ciriza could have chosen to place the fragments on the ground, but he did not. Though this new configuration remains in balance, Ciriza gives the pieces their own continuity and a further natural attraction. And here is where we find the third component mentioned above, the number of bodies appearing automatically generating a synergy between them both laterally and vertically. This synergy always present in ourselves and our surroundings becomes even more evident in our eyes and acquires its own in the artwork of Ciriza, since he presents such an act of movement, isolated from any other form or circumstance to disperse our attention, as is the case of the Japanese haiku.

The isolated reflection of movements in his sculptures enlightens all kinds of symbolism for the viewers as the artwork reflects a poetic dimension that sublimates. Does it not arouse a feeling of emptiness? After all, what is the vacuum? Is it simply air? Of course not. In order for the vacuum to exist, it previously possessed a presence; a presence that is not there anymore. The disappearance of presence is nothing more than absence. And the absence occupies space which is paradoxical to the naked eye. Not only does absence takes space, but it can harm or even burden in some cases. This can be confirmed by anyone who has lost a loved one and lives with their absence, or anyone who has experience overcoming a fear in their lives. In other instances, it can be a joy or relief. In either case, the sensation involves a change, whether emotional or physical. And so, the movements of Ciriza's pieces can be interpreted as movements of the soul, emotional changes, which the artist manages in a form. But to reach this point of interpretation, one must observe, take time to contemplate, and let the synergy emitted by the sculptures flow into their souls.





## **Universality of the work and international projection of the artist**

Since the essential and basic is common to all humankind at all times, it is not surprising that the work of Carlos Ciriza connects with all kinds of people and cultures. This is confirmed by the fact that his work is distributed in over twenty countries.

As in disciplines such as literature or cinema, it is understood that classical artwork has a universal sense which is relevant at any time and place, then one can say that the artwork of Ciriza is also classical in nature. At the moment, it is only evident that his work has been appreciated in countries as disparate as Armenia, Finland, Philippines, United States, Dubai Emirate, and because the artist is young, it is impossible to know the impact that his work will have over time. I am sure that people will never cease to be sensitive to the formal and existential reflections that Ciriza irradiates tirelessly and with discipline through his artwork created in the solitude of a workshop in Pamplona.



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