

A Monster Who Tells the Truth

Exhibition series curated by Pilar Cruz

Fito Conesa

Our Own Path Remains

From 21 September
to 4 November 2018

In 1968, the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt premiered his work *Credo*, scandalising the cultural authorities of his country, which was then under Soviet domination. He was already regarded as a suspicious individual who composed 'avant-garde bourgeois music', inspired by the twelve-tone technique. In *Credo*, Pärt expresses in musical terms a stylistic and personal crisis that he had been struggling with for some time. He then commenced a search for the tools that would help him to chart his own path. Consequently, he gave up composing, withdrew into self-imposed exile and embarked on his own particular crossing of the desert, a painful spiritual and artistic quest. He looked back at ancient music, studied Gregorian chant and the polyphonic music of the early Renaissance and even experimented with visual aspects. The time eventually came when he felt capable once again of transforming into something new everything he had learned during this period when he had given up writing music. He started from scratch, with a blank

sheet, so to speak, and did away with all the 'a priorisms' of his earlier career.

The result of this process, *Tabula Rasa* (Blank Slate), was performed for the first time in 1977 in Tallinn. Due to the impact it made and its influence on contemporary music, both high-brow and pop, it may be regarded as the piece that ushered in a new and fruitful method of composition. In addition, it paved the way for minimalism, a new genre that proved fundamental in the closing quarter of the 20th century.

Taking Arvo Pärt as his starting point, Fito Conesa uses the concept of a professional and personal crisis as a method, as a way to generate knowledge, to unveil new spaces of thinking and almost as a form of resistance. In contrast with the idea of indiscriminate production that follows timeworn patterns, modes and words, Conesa advocates the pause, distance and, in short, the break with the past that brings about a crisis when paths are no longer leading anywhere. He also supports giving up an artistic discipline in order to be reborn in it and to reinvent oneself, the indiscriminate leap from one discipline to another as a profound, rather than just superficial, possibility of creative exploration.

In his exhibition, Conesa creates an acoustic shell, a spatial device for listening as a transcendent experience. It is an almost religious construction, a gateway into another realm.

Influenced stylistically by Pärt's music, the artist has composed a piece for two double basses that can be heard in the room. Is he a visual artist composer? A musician passing incognito in contemporary art? What he has, to be more accurate, is an unprejudiced way of overcoming creative and hyperspecialised rigidities, of doing away with the boundaries between disciplines, of creating within his individual and unique artistic and life's path, drawing out all the plasticity that music can contain and exploring the territories of synaesthesia.

The Cor Jove (Youth Choir) of the Orfeó Català, with its choirmaster, Esteve Nabona, has added a layer of vocals to Fito Conesa's composition in an exercise in horizontal and joint creation that is rare among classical music ensembles and among the standard forms in the Western musical tradition.

Another important element is invoked in this project: mysticism and a certain sense of transcendence, which transforms into escape or travel. Conesa is not proposing to restore this religiosity – essential in the arts and sciences prior to the Enlightenment – centre stage but to map the branches of this spiritual line to the present day. Even though this mysticism does not lie precisely where we might expect to find it. And this is where we see come into play the curious way in which certain episodes of popular culture are infiltrated by a more elitist sphere.

This is the case of the appearance of minimalist music on the dance floors along the now legendary Ruta del Bakalao. This route, consisting of a string of clubs on main roads on the outskirts of Valencia in the late 1980s and early

90s, was a youth leisure movement that blended new forms of music, club culture and drugs. In the discos along the Ruta – among them, The Face, Chocolate and Spook – DJs would play and remix contemporary minimalist musicians such as Steve Reich and Wim Mertens. Nights at the clubs on the Ruta, the way in which leisure music was consumed and all the other now legendary elements that made up this youth subculture are still part of a mystical journey. The Ruta was the working class's only ecstatic means of escape to a place outside their everyday lives.

This last turn is recorded in Conesa's video documentary *Maximizing the Audience*, which can be seen in the exhibition rooms of the Fundació Joan Miró during the LOOP Festival. It consists of a return journey along that personal path that always remains, along which we will be able to witness the process of the creation of the choral part of the piece in Espai 13, as well as a road trip by car that takes in some of the legendary places – or their ruins – on the Ruta while listening to Arvo Pärt and other minimalist composers.

Pilar Cruz

Architecture: Olga Subirós Studio
Vocals: Cor Jove of the Orfeó Català
Choirmaster: Esteve Nabona

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#MonstreEspai13

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