

Colombia's National Museum opens Antonio Caro retrospective

By Richard Emblin - March 31, 2022



Museo Nacional

Colombia's National Museum is hosting a retrospective of Antonio Caro (1950-2021) to mark the first-year anniversary of the conceptual artist's death. Caro, who was an outspoken critic of how art was presented by institutions, and someone who opted to show his multi-medium works within non-artistic spaces, among them creative workshops, is also best known in the country for his Colombia/Coca-Cola serigraph. Yet despite a half-century trajectory as an artist, Caro was not prolific, "carrying out more creative workshops than works," over a lifetime, states the exhibition's curator Víctor Manuel Rodríguez.

"The Antonio Caro tribute recognizes this, and imagines the Museum as a great collective

creation workshop, that inspires participants to share the critical concerns of the creator, and continue questioning the role of the art institution,” highlights Rodríguez. “Caro showed us the tragic fate of the nation’s memory: its inability to account for the multiplicity of narratives and places,” he said. Rodríguez holds a PhD from the University of Rochester and an MA from Goldsmith’s College, London.

Titled in Spanish as *Acción plástica: homenaje a Antonio Caro*, the retrospective is divided in seven sections, each based on representative themes of an artist who was described by fellow artist Luis Camnitzer as a “visual guerrilla,” even though Caro envisioned himself as a “failed political artist” since his days in the fine arts program at the Universidad Nacional de Bogotá. An institution he dropped-out from in the mid-1960s to work under the mentorship of Bernardo Salcedo and “without pressure of a political principle.” In an interview with Rodríguez for BOMB magazine, Caro admits that he “tried to contribute more to art than to politics.”

The exhibition includes two early works by Caro – Head of Lleras and Imperialism Is a Paper Tiger – revealing the artist’s methodology and intent to create information art grounded in historical interpretation. The Head of Lleras was made from salt and outfitted with spectacles, resembling a bust of President Carlos Lleras Restrepo who ended his term in 1970, and same year the piece was shown as part of the National Arts Salon of the National Museum.

The original *pièce* was housed inside a glass box until droplets of water dissolved the face of the Liberal leader, sending salt water over the museum’s floor. In the retrospective, audiences are invited to reproduce this process, and tribute the artist’s belief that “the creative proposal can be constantly repeated,” states the Museum’s director Juliana Restrepo. Or in the words of Caro: “Art needs creativity, but creativity does not need art.”

With Imperialism is a Paper Tiger spectators will be able to hang from the Museum’s ceiling disposable tiger silhouettes as the artist did back in 1972 at the Bogotá planetarium. When the installation opened with a large red banner of Mao’s famous phrase as a backdrop, leftist artists were not amused and mocked Caro’s critique of China’s cultural revolution. “I did have the preconceived idea to make a political piece, but the result did not convince those in political circles. It was a very crucial moment, to be rejected by the political orthodoxy,” he said.

The exhibition also includes print works that show the close relationship of the artist with commercial typography, posters and historically distanced mediums, including achiote dye and xeroxing. In sections Tribute to Manuel Quintín Lame, Corn and Art does not fit here, audiences are also encouraged to participate with different mediums, and tribute to an artist who in 1978 coined the phrase “Todo esta muy Caro,” and pun on his last name and word Expensive.

Antonio Caro’s works are included in the Latin America collections of Tate Modern, London; Queens Museum, New York; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin; and Museo de Arte Moderno, Bogotá.

The artist died age 71 from heart-failure in Bogotá and was represented by the Casas Riegner Gallery.

The exhibition is open from April 1 to June 26.

Museo Nacional: Cra 7 No.28-66 | Open Tuesdays to Sundays: 9:00am to 5:00pm.



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