

JOSÉ LUIS ALEXANCO ALEGORÍAS MÉTRICAS. (1973 - 1978)

16 FEBRUARY - 23 APRIL 2022

A curled-up figure gives us its back, indifferent to our gaze. Its skin has become an armour that shelters it from the reality around it. In "Soldier", 1964, José Luis Alexanco displays his friend from the military service and fellow artist, Darío Villalba, completely stripped of any features that might define him as an individual. For Alexanco, the figure serves as a means to achieve the true purpose of his work and ultimately his life obsession: to x-ray the motion and mutations generated in the body. A form of movement that would diverge from the gestural tendencies of an informalism already in decline, and which, through its constant dissection, would convert time into matter.

In successive works, the figure, dispossessed of all personality, moves through a system of plots that subject it to processes of fragmentation, serialisation and sequencing characteristic of a self-generating logic, an event on the fringes of creative inspiration.

This was just a step away from a time when the advent of automation would become a real experience that developed automatically, without the artist's assistance. That next step would come by the hand of a historic milestone, the creation of the Computer Centre, which was born out of a partnership between the University of Madrid and IBM. This marked the arrival of Spain's first university computer, which would be used exclusively for creative research. Miguel Fisac designed the building that would house the great IBM7990 computer and serve as a headquarters for the activities and seminars of the Computer Centre, which would soon become the most important experimental interdisciplinary hub of 20th-century Spain.

The autumn of 1968 marked the start of the Seminar on Automatic Generation of Plastic Shapes, where Alexanco was one of the most prominent participants and the only artist to create a computer program through which instructions could be given that would generate automatic transformations on a specific object. The figures proposed by the computer were built by placing successive layers of plexiglass on top of each other, until the figure was complete. In 1972, after having assembled more than forty of these figures, the artist realised it was not necessary to objectify the figure when it could exist in constant transformation; using a keyboard and an ordinary cathode ray tube monitor, anyone could execute and live this experience. Hence, the dematerialised figure became perpetual motion.

The allegorical space of the painting would provide continuity to that intangible event that is now memory. Imprints of the figure in motion, studies of sections and curving lines are repeated and amass in a pictorial imaginary that captures the mark of what has taken place.

Jose Luis Alexanco (Madrid, 1942-2021) is the forefather of one of the most fertile and experimental times of the Contemporary Arts in Spain and the rest of Europe: The Pamplona Encounters 1972. He developed a project titled MOUVNT. Computable forms, 1968 - 1974, that supposed the first systematical collaboration between art practice and technology and contributed to develop the basis of the Computer Art movement in the late 1960s in Europe. Furthermore, it was key to introduce experimental approaches into the Spanish art scene questioning the official cultural politics during Franco's ruling.

His works are placed in collections such as Victoria & Albert Museum, London; The Chase Manhattan Bank, New York; MNCARS, Madrid; MACBA, Barcelona and Fundación Juan March, among others.