

XAVIER MASCARÓ

GEBERT CONTEMPORARY
558 CANYON ROAD, SANTA FE

XAVIER MASCARÓ'S MEDIEVALISM IS ENTICING. THERE'S A POPULAR THIRST

for a time when magic, religion, royals, sex, titles, birthright, bloodlines, swordfights, and death by beheading, dismembering, burning, and hanging were realities. Mascaró's metal and ceramic sculptures evoke these dramas, which are escapist yet instinctual.

The artist is Spanish, though he was born in Paris, and keeps studios in Madrid and Mexico City. His work is raw, rugged, and personal. It's long preceded by Iberian bronze workers and a handful of contemporary Spanish sculptors. It incites questions of law and revolution, social realism and paganism, the real and the magical.

His recent solo show at Saatchi Gallery, in London, *Departure* (now closed), displayed some of his signature monumental sculptures installed outside like historic heroes. *The Guardians* series was previously exhibited at the Palais Royal garden in Paris and the Paseo del Prado in Madrid. They evoke an assortment of icons whose associations run throughout Mascaró's work and solidify his penchant for something lasting, if not primal. At Saatchi, five iron-armor-clad figures sitting in lotus position, each ten feet high, greeted visitors. Although inspired by ancient Greek and Egyptian statues, their repetition and stoicism is equally reminiscent of the funereal Chinese terracotta warriors meant to protect and serve the first Emperor of China in the afterlife. Their hierarchical scale suggests the Soviet-style social realist idealized politicians, but the titanic rusted iron bodywork, the most notable characteristic, is bound with promises of integrity and protection. These statuesque sentinels are faultless public monuments: Buddhas ready to serve and protect.

A smaller version of Mascaró's totemic guardian is here at Gebert Contemporary, cast in ceramic with iron fixtures—a juxtaposition of white and metal evocative of fencing attire. The sculptor's Santa Fe show has no public monuments, but does present a very cool, equally epic capsule collection of smaller works.

The horsemen in *Riders*, whose mounts look like miniature Trojan horses, have strength in numbers. They may be small, but the seven shin-height warriors suspended above svelte stilts are purposeful. The rods make them taller, suggest infrastructure and weaponry, and lend import to their otherwise stinky puppetry. Their iron bodies are tarnished, holey, and show protruding nails. They tell of defeat and survival: the horses are missing sections here and there as if dismembered or burned, which is fitting for a medium subject to such extreme, sometimes-ravenous heat. In a magical twist, the men have no legs. The torso meets the horse and becomes one, fusing man and animal into a mammal of centaur descent.

Eleanora is a four-foot-high head resting on a low pedestal. Its large scale suggests a fallen, dismembered ruler taken down in political upheaval whose original embodied stature was purposefully deific. The bronze head is hollowed and the surface, cut to leave a puzzle pattern, imbues her skin with a lacey, feminine ephemerality. The likeness is based on profiles from ancient coins, and the head, contoured by iron, suggests the lingering presence of the antiquated coin itself. In fact, Mascaró's desire to sculpt came from a longing

to leave something behind, and his works are artifacts in their own right. *Eleanora*, despite her phantom embodied scale, does not tower above but rests low where we may inspect her as voyeurs of something esteemed.

Across from her is *Circle*, seven smaller versions of *Eleanora* in ceramic with iron fastenings, all facing one another. Their insularity feels Wiccan and cliquish, and with iron bandages that mask their eyes they become anonymous, even replaceable. Nonetheless, each figure exudes mysterious strength.

Five hearts hang in the entryway of the gallery. *Love* is a quintet of the dangling organs made from glass, copper, pewter, resin, and iron. Their tesserae surfaces glisten in the light like Christian mosaics, but iron bars stab through the interiors to hold the things together, protruding like pins in a voodoo doll. They vary in size, each one a different color, each harboring the talismanic strength of pagan puppetry.

Armor is integral, soldiers ride on horses, and hearts are accessible for magical malpractice. Mascaró's sculpture indulges an escapist longing so poignant to our smooth, arguably vacant habitat. He leaves a trail of tactile objects that propose an honorific narrative, where solemnity is rife, and our emblems are heroic.

—HANNAH HOEL

Xavier Mascaró, *Queen, head of Alexandra with four heads of Eleanora*, iron, variable dimensions, 2014

