

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Pedro Reyes

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1037 N. Sycamore Avenue, Los Angeles

For his first exhibition in Los Angeles, Pedro Reyes presents a new series of sculptures and works on paper that focus on the concept of monumentality, drawing inspiration from the traditions of Mexican stone carving and Pre-Columbian civilization and indigenous communities. Through these works, Reyes credits the enduring influence of the Aztec traditions and the language of Nahuatl, which has been spoken in Mexico for centuries. The exhibition follows Reyes' exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Monterrey, Mexico (2022) and SITE Santa Fe (2022-2023).

"Every gesture conveys a set of political meanings", says Reyes. *Detente* (2023) – a new work in the exhibition – refers to a relaxation of hostility between nations, often through verbal diplomacy, and has a particular resonance with policies that relate to arms deals, be it the use of weapons or nuclear power. Speaking to Reyes' involvement with pacifist organizations and his public campaigns for disarmament, in *Detente* we see the symbol of the hand-dove, reflecting his aspirations for solidarity, compassion and collaboration. The artist attributed one of his mentors, the Brazilian activist and theatre director, Augusto Boal, as an influence in promoting "Peace, not passivity." This message also resonates with the slogan by Martin Luther King: "Those who hope for peace should be as well organized as those who fight for war." To Reyes, the hand-dove symbolizes the intensive labor required to confront the arms race.

At the heart of the exhibition is the concept of monumentality. Monumentality is present throughout Reyes' oeuvre; he produces work on every scale – from intimate and life-size sculptures and paintings to the activation of public spaces with exigent, participatory installations and performances – yet the essence of monumental extends beyond scale, and into ambition. Reyes also intentionally translates the epic objectives of urban sculpture into the small-scale, approaching production as a means to ignite compassion. Another sculpture presented, *El Abrazo* (2023) is a group of anthropomorphic silhouettes that appear to be holding hands, serving as a symbol of fraternal union.

Amoxcalli, the name given to libraries in ancient Mexico, is the title of a large-scale work in the exhibition that depicts a standing figure clutching a book. This personifies the artist's thirst for knowledge and passion for the communal act of sharing, as evidenced by projects such as *TLACUILO* (2021), where Reyes launched Mexico's first Art-lending library, at the Museo Carrillo Gil in Mexico City, as well as the infamous, towering library in his own studio in Mexico-City.

While *El Abrazo* and *Amoxcalli*, alongside *Hypatia* (2022) and *Cihuacóatl* (2022) also exhibited, are more figurative expressions of the human form, in *Chac Mool* (2022) Reyes takes the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican composition of the reclining figure to a deeper level of abstraction. Previously explored by artists such as Henry Moore, this representation differs from the erect, heroic position more commonly realized in monuments as it is a figure at rest. While noting other pre-Hispanic effigies, such as U-shaped archaeological artifacts, Reyes reduces the *Chac Mool* to a curve: a circular form created from Jadeite, a green sedimentary stone that accumulates layers of history. In this way, these stone works, alongside other vertical totemic structures such as *Tlatoani* (2023), *The Treaty* (2023) and *Tlapacalli* (2021), can be understood as a way of reading time, each stratum frozen by the atomic particles placed on top. A final circular sculpture, *Tonametl* (2023), illustrates the connection between stone and sun, earth and sky.

These symbols also evolve in the new paintings on show – some paired and others a balance of opposites – made from oil on amate paper, a material considered sacred. Amate paper was historically used by 'Tlacuilos', an ancient Mexican term for both writer and painter, who used amate to record their experiences. Often used for renderings of spirits of the earth, here the amate paintings represent an exchange between histories, cultures and traditions. Just as through sculpture, Reyes channels the power of monumental thought into this material, using the work as a way to encourage and celebrate camaraderie and understanding.

About the artist

Pedro Reyes has won international attention for large-scale projects that address current social and political issues. Through a varied practice utilising sculpture, performance, video, and activism, Reyes explores the power of individual and collective organisation to incite change through communication, creativity, happiness, and humour. A socio-political critique of contemporary gun culture is addressed in Reyes's ongoing *Palas por Pistolas*, in which the artist worked with local authorities in Culiacán, Mexico, to melt down guns into shovels, then used to plant trees in cities elsewhere in the world. Similarly, in Reyes' major continuing *Disarm* series, firearms confiscated by the Mexican government and donated to Reyes have been transformed into instruments, which are then activated by local musicians. Issues of community and compassion are addressed in *Sanatorium*, activated at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York (2011), dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel, Germany (2012), The Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2013) and at The Power Plant in Toronto and The Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami (2014). In this work, visitors are invited to sign up for a 'temporary clinic,' with the mission of treating various kinds of urban malaise. His immersive exhibition *Doomocracy*, organised by Creative Time at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, was a 'political house of horrors' marking the confluence of two events haunting the American cultural imagination at the time: Halloween and the 2016 US presidential election. Most recently, Reyes has worked with The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists and ICAN to stage anti-nuclear protests and performances across the world. Titled, *Amnesia Atómica ZERO NUKES*, this movement has found platforms in New York; Mexico City; Vienna and Oslo. Alongside these performative, socially engaged strands of his practice, Reyes continues to make sculpture. Carved in red and black volcanic stone, marble and jadeite, these often monumental works that weave between figuration and abstraction reference sources as diverse as Greco Roman statuary; British Modernism and Mesoamerican sculpture.

Reyes (b. 1972, Mexico City) lives and works in Mexico City. He studied architecture at the Ibero-American University in Mexico City. Solo exhibitions have been held with SITE Santa Fe, NM, USA (2023); MARTa Herford, Herford, Germany (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art of Monterrey, Monterrey, Mexico (2022); MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal (2021); Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland (2020); SCAD, Georgia, USA (2019); Creative Time, New York, USA (2016); Dallas Contemporary, TX, USA (2016); La Tallera, Cuernavaca, Mexico (2016); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2015); ICA, Miami, FL, USA (2014); The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada (2014); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA (2011); Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, USA (2011); CCA Kitakyushu, Japan (2009); Bass Museum, Miami, FL, USA (2008); and San Francisco Art Institute, CA, USA (2008). Reyes has participated in group exhibitions at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan (2015); The National Museum of XXI Century Arts (MAXXI), Rome (2015); Beijing Biennale, China (2014); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2013); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany (2012); Liverpool Biennial, UK (2012); Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2012); Lyon Biennale, France (2009); and the 50th Venice Biennale, Italy (2003). In Fall 2016, Reyes served as the inaugural Dasha Zhukova Distinguished Visiting Artist at MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (CAST) at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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