

Oswaldo Maciá

London based Oswaldo Maciá specialises in sound and smell sculptures, installations and videos. He was born in 1960 in Cartagena de Indias on the Caribbean coast of Colombia where he lived until he completed a BA in Fine Arts at the Escuela de Artes de Cartagena (1980). Growing up in the sensuous city of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whom he knew, is key to understanding his work based on sensory perception. After a few years teaching drawing in Bogotá, and studying mural painting in Barcelona, he moved to London to complete a BA in sculpture at the Guildhall and an MA of Fine Arts at Goldsmiths' College (1994).

Maciá is best known for his sound piece *Something going on above my head* (1995-1999) that has been shown in twelve cities around the world and was installed in 2015 in the newly refurbished rotunda at Tate Britain in London. The piece consists of fifteen loudspeakers playing a symphony of bird songs from two thousand different birds chosen in equal parts from Africa, America, Asia and Europe. The title of the piece refers both to the startling effect of the surrounding sound and our careless response to the cacophony of daily news - Maciá was inspired by listening to the crucial news of Russians dumping nuclear waste in the Baltic sea that went unnoticed. Titles play an important role in the work of Maciá: 'Titles are essential for me: they are the tactile part of my work.' He reinterpreted this piece for *Escenario en Construcción (Stage in Construction)* a major public commission that he won in Bogota, due to be inaugurated in the fall of 2016. Located on a busy roundabout opposite Universidad de los Andes, the piece consists of an installation of hollow cubes, evoking silence in music, and overscale steel cones to be used as megaphones transmitting a crescendo of bird songs for one minute on the hour, every hour throughout the day. 'The piece will work as a clock, but also as a reminder that we are getting late to our responsibility towards the environment', says Maciá - Colombia has one of the world's most varied biodiversity and he used the recording of one thousand nine hundred different birds from Colombia for the piece.

Another important sound piece Maciá has created is *Surrounded by Tears* (2004) a collaboration with the composer Michael Nyman and the designer Jasper Morrison for the 2004 Liverpool Biennial. A compilation of one hundred recordings of people crying, from the death wail of Aborigines in Australia recorded in 1898, that he found at the British Library, to the first cries of a new born child that he commissioned, it turned crying from an intimate private matter into an uncomfortable public experience. 'This is a key purpose of my work: to make the personal universal', he says.

Maciá has also created important olfactive pieces, particularly *Memory Skip* (1995), his first smell sculpture shown in London, a rubbish skip filled with pine-scented detergent that filled the space with 'the gagging smell of cleanliness' as a viewer put it. For the more complex *Calumny* (2007) and *The Library of Cynicism* (2013) he enlisted the help of professional perfumers to replicate through smells presented in glass bells and swinging pendulums the questioning of truth and reality as taught by ancient Greek thinkers. At the First Cartagena Biennial (2014), he presented *Anestesia (Anesthesia)* an acoustic-olfactive sculpture that spectacularly associated anesthetic smells diffused by heated wax with the sound of bees to create a parallel between the etymology of *aesthetic* and the numbing of

all our senses except vision. Recording endangered species of bees and their language, based on vibrations rather than sound, is Maciá's latest field of research.

Maciá's key concern is to inspire the viewer to put into question accepted notions of knowledge and perception. Although his works are immediately seductive, he wants them to force the viewer to stop and think as opposed to being merely entertained. 'I am interested in how an audio experience becomes a vision, how a sound becomes an image. I am interested in this form of contemplation', he says.

Catherine Petigas