

MoMA PRESENTS FIRST NORTH AMERICAN RETROSPECTIVE OF ARMANDO REVERÓN, AN EARLY MODERNIST FROM VENEZUELA

Exhibition Includes Monochromatic Landscape and Figurative Paintings of the 1920s and 1930s, Self-Portraits and Drawings of the 1940s, Life-Size Dolls, and Objects

Armando Reverón

February 11—April 16, 2007

The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art Gallery, sixth floor

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 6, 2007—The first North American retrospective of the celebrated Venezuelan artist Armando Reverón (1889-1954) introduces the work of one of Latin America's most important early modernists to an international audience. Comprising some 100 works, the exhibition surveys the 30 years of Reverón's most important production, from around 1920 to the early 1950s, through paintings and drawings of landscape and figural subjects, together with the life-size dolls (*muñecas*) that the artist used as models, and other non-functioning objects created in the 1940s. On view from February 11 to April 16, 2007, *Armando Reverón* is organized by John Elderfield, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art. Luis Pérez-Oramas, recently appointed The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art at the Museum, was consultant to the exhibition, which was organized in collaboration with the Proyecto Armando Reverón, Caracas, of which Mr. Pérez-Oramas is a member, and the Fundación Museos Nacionales of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, custodians of the national collections of the artist's works. The exhibition is on view in The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art Gallery on the sixth floor.

Explains Mr. Elderfield, "By the time of his death, in 1954, Reverón was beginning to be celebrated in Venezuela both for the radicalism of his early paintings and for the mysteriousness of his late works, and he would soon be recognized as that nation's greatest early modernist."

Born in Caracas on May 10, 1889, to distinguished parents of Spanish descent, Reverón studied art in Caracas and then traveled to Spain to study in Barcelona and Madrid, where he was especially impressed by the work of Francisco de Goya. He may have seen Impressionist paintings during a visit to Paris in 1914. Back in Caracas, he participated in the *Círculo de Bellas Artes*, a group of young artists seeking to develop a specifically national modernism, and in the years around 1920 he created the mysterious, blue-toned paintings, influenced by turn-of-century European Symbolism, that open the first gallery of the exhibition. These include the figure paintings *Portrait of Casilda (Retrato de Casilda, 1920)* and *The Cave (La cueva, 1920)*, also influenced by Goya, and moody landscapes that mark the beginning of his engagement with painting depictions of specifically Venezuelan scenes. Soon, however, Reverón moved to the small

town of Macuto, on the Caribbean coast, where, over a number of years, he built a complex that came to be called El Castillete (The Little Castle). There, he made the celebrated, almost monochromatic landscapes—also shown in the first gallery—that established his reputation as Venezuela's most radical early modernist artist. These paintings of the *ranchos* (huts or cabins) at El Castillete, and the coastal views of the Caribbean landscape, with its coconut trees and *uversos* (sea grape trees), have been interpreted as depictions of the blindingly intense light of this tropical region. But they also have a highly tactile quality that shows they are more than simply perceptual paintings. In this period, the artist began painting on old flour sacks and using homemade paintbrushes that he assembled from bamboo twigs, pencils, and animal bones, all covered with nubs of burlap. The paintings he produced at this time range from the almost abstract *The Tree* (*El árbol*, 1931) to the mysterious *Sea Grape Trees* (*Uversos*, 1927) in which figures may be hidden in the camouflage-like surface.

The second gallery of the exhibition features Reverón's figurative works of the 1930s, which include both portraits and large, ambitious figure compositions. The sepia tonality of these works indicate the shadowy interior spaces where they were painted, mostly inside El Castillete. Some of the painted models, dressed in feather necklaces and crowns—among them *Daughter of the Sun* (*Hija del sol*, 1933) and *Two Female Figures* (*Dos figuras*, 1935)—resemble the artist's idea of the native people who had populated the area before its colonization. A later composition, *Five Figures* (*Cinco figuras*, 1939), was almost certainly painted from life-size dolls.

The third gallery shows the artist's return to landscape painting in the early 1940s, producing not only pure landscapes but also depictions of the Port of La Guaira: the first industrial images in Venezuelan art. These works include views of the workshops around the port such as *Workshop at the Port of La Guaira* (*Taller del servicio portuario*, 1944) as well as strangely frozen views of the town as in *Street of La Guaira* (*Calle de La Guaira*, 1942). Although these works ostensibly speak of an engagement with the external world, they all have a quality of silence and disengagement. So, it is not entirely surprising that, in the latter part of the 1940s, Reverón retreated into El Castillete to concentrate on figurative imagery, mainly paintings and drawings of the dolls.

The fourth and final gallery presents series of drawings of the artist surrounded by his doll-models, along with a selection of the dolls themselves, and some of the objects that Reverón and his companion Juanita Ríos made at El Castillete. Works in this gallery include a sequence of three drawings—*Old Man, Three Women, and a Child* (*Anciano, tres mujeres y niño*, 1948), *Christmas Scene with Dolls* (*Navidad de muñecas*, 1949), and *Woman with Dolls* (*Mujer con muñecas*, 1949)—based on a similar group of posed dolls; sequences of serially-conceived self-portraits, and some of the most dramatic objects, ranging from *Bat Wings* (*Alas de murciélago*, 1940s) to *Bird Cage* (*Pajarera*, 1940s) to one of the skeletons, plus three of the dolls. Also included are two paintings of Niza, one of Reverón's dolls. The objects seen here, and in the

portals between the galleries, provide a sense of what El Castillete looked like in the artist's lifetime.

In 1974, El Castillete was converted into the Museo Armando Reverón, and the dolls and objects were taken to the Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas, for safekeeping. In December 1999, El Castillete was destroyed by mudslides that overwhelmed the region.

ORGANIZATION:

This exhibition is organized by The Museum of Modern Art in cooperation with the Fundación Museos Nacionales of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the Proyecto Armando Reverón, Caracas.



SPONSORSHIP:

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PUBLICATIONS:

The exhibition *Armando Reverón* is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue of the same name, the first major publication on Reverón in English. A critical essay by John Elderfield discusses the artist in the context of modern art, while an essay by Luis Pérez-Oramas examines Reverón's place in Latin American art. Introductory texts by Nora Lawrence, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, accompany the more than 100 works—paintings, drawings, life-size dolls, and objects—which are both included in the exhibition and illustrated in the catalogue. Clothbound: 10 X 10 inches; 240 pages; 164 color and 41 b&w illustrations. \$45. The book is distributed to the trade through Distributed Art Publishers (D.A.P.) in the United States and Canada and through Thames & Hudson outside of North America. It will be available in February 2007 at MoMA Stores and online at www.momastore.org. A Spanish-language version of the catalogue is tentatively scheduled for Spring 2008.

PROGRAMS:

There will be a symposium held in three parts, in New York, Caracas, and Miami; to discuss Reverón's work. On Wednesday, February 28, 2007, at 6:00 p.m. in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2 at The Museum of Modern Art, the first segment of this symposium will be held, titled *Armando Reverón: Another Modernity?* Participants include John Elderfield (The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA), María Elena Huizi (independent scholar, Caracas), Luis Pérez-Oramas (The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art, MoMA), and Susan Stewart (Annan Professor of English, Princeton University). The second segment will be held in Caracas and the third in Miami, on dates yet to be established. Tickets for the New York symposium are \$10; \$8 for members; \$5 for students, seniors, and staff of other museums.

On Monday, April 2 and Thursday, April 5, 2007, Brown Bag Lunch Lectures will be held in The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education and Research Building at 4 West 54 Street, Classroom B, from 12:30 to 1:15 p.m. Attendees may bring their own lunches. Tickets are \$5; \$3 for members, students, and seniors; and can be purchased at the lobby information desk, at the Film

desk, or in the Cullman Building lobby. Tickets are also available online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern.

MoMA AUDIO:

In conjunction with this exhibition, the Museum will offer two distinct MoMA Audio programs, in English and in Spanish, available on one listening device. The English version includes commentaries by John Elderfield, and the Spanish version includes commentaries by Luis Pérez-Oramas. This program, along with all other MoMA Audio programs, is offered free of charge courtesy of Bloomberg. It is also available for download at www.moma.org/audio and on the MoMA Audio podcast on iTunes. The program will be available when the exhibition opens to the public on February 11, 2007.

EXHIBITION WEB SITE:

The accompanying Web site, www.moma.org/reveron, features a selection of thematically organized works from the exhibition. Texts and audio clips in English and Spanish accompany the images, and there is an index of all works included on the site. Visitors can zoom in on the images and change the background screen color for better viewing of these subtly colored works. Programming and design are by Amelle Stein of Rendermonkey.

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For high resolution images, please visit our online press office Web site: www.moma.org/press. Please call for user name and password.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free for children 16 and under. Free for members. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs)

Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

Film Admission: \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)

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The public may call 212/708-9400 for detailed Museum information.

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