

Bonner Kunstverein
Hochstadenring 22, 53119
Bonn, Germany

Hochstadenring 22, D-53119 Bonn
Tel. +49 228 693936, Fax +49 228 695589
bonner-kunstverein.de

David Medalla: Parables of Friendship

Bonner Kunstverein
18 September 2021 – 30 January 2022
Opening: 17 September, 5-10pm
Curated by Fatima Hellberg and Steven Cairns

Bonner Kunstverein and Museion present David Medalla: Parables of Friendship, the first in-depth survey of the late-Filipino artist's work to be presented in Europe. This large-scale, two-part presentation foregrounds Medalla's vital avant-garde legacy, reflecting on the spirit, ethos, energy and radicality of his practice. Planned during Medalla's lifetime, the exhibition has been realised in close collaboration with the David Medalla Archive in Berlin, following the artist's untimely passing in December 2020.

Spanning his seven-decade-long career, Parables of Friendship presents a body of work that encompasses drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, neon, kinetic art, performance and participatory art. Works from Medalla's vast archive appear alongside loaned pieces and new commissions, with many fragile and previously unseen works that have been specially restored and will be publicly presented for the first time. Building on the contemporary relevance and urgency of Medalla's practice, Parables of Friendship makes connections between the historical strands and legacies of his approach.

Heavily influenced by European art and literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, Medalla travelled to Europe from the Philippines as a young man, arriving in Marseille in 1960, where he began to establish his peripatetic practice. As an active figure in 1960s London, Medalla was instrumental in the short-lived but pioneering and

influential Signals Gallery (1962-64), the experimental performance collective The Exploding Galaxy (1967-68) and the politically engaged Artists for Democracy, of which he was chairman (1974-77). In later years, Medalla founded The Mondrian Fan Club, in collaboration with artist Adam Nankervis (1994), and the London Biennale (2000), where processes of collaboration and exchange continued to assert their relevance to his practice.

These moments of intense dialogue were catalysts to his interconnected vision. His work is characterised by openness and freedom of expression, and his approach and ethos – both artistically and politically – are founded on the possibility of a form of exchange that invites engagement and fosters an active exploration of the intersection between art and life. In his art-making, writing and activist work, Medalla maintained an ongoing dialogue with questions of ecology, cultural identity, sexuality and an ethics of practice, with little concern for compartmentalization or static meaning.

Medalla lived in many places, including London, Paris, Venice, Berlin, New York and Manila, and the experiences of travel, place, transition and flux run throughout his work. It was often ephemeral or perishable, produced using materials that resulted from a particular circumstance or place in which he found himself – a canvas, a napkin, an envelope, a notebook – with his chosen medium frequently reflecting the sincerely free nature of his practice. His instantaneous 'impromptu' performances were similarly transitory, occurring in the moment and simply recorded through writing and photographs. His performative presence – an embodied materiality – was symbolic of self-reliance and the possibility of creating art with little means.

Medalla's work exists in multiple realities, some of them fictional and located beyond a dominant paradigm of the real – a movement between the material and the spiritual. As its title suggests, Parables of Friendship is dedicated to affinity and a socially engaged approach, but also and significantly to the idea of transcendence. This doubleness lies at the heart of Medalla's practice: an engagement, on the one hand, with the world – with terms of collaboration, networks and a politics of cohabitation – and of mythology, friendship and play and its transformative potential on the other. For Medalla, the 'desire and pursuit of the whole' necessitated an exploration of difference. His work contains reflections on the paradoxes, both liberating and painful, that reside within cultural identity. Identity in Medalla's work is a multitemporal and multidirectional process – a profoundly experiential and experimental relation to being. The ways in which multiplicity was

explored within his practice - with curiosity, criticality and humour - are themselves a part of the spirit and approach that this exhibition seeks to channel and honour.

Across the multiplicity of forms, contexts and his tireless drive to make, connect and shift there was an underpinning "desire and pursuit of the whole." A process which for Medalla necessitated an exploration of difference. His work contains reflections on the paradoxes, both the liberating and the individual and collective traumas, residing within cultural identity. Identity in Medalla's work is a multi-temporal and multi-directional process - a profoundly experiential and experimental relation to being. These were facets that for Medalla were artistic, philosophical but also lived, and as such have profoundly shaped his life, art and the ways in which Parables of Friendship is conceived across exhibitions, events and publications.

The exhibition is funded by Kulturstiftung des Bundes, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media, Outset Germany_Switzerland, Kunststiftung NRW, Ministry of Culture and Science of the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia and Stiftung Kunst Erlebnis.

Museion
Piazza Piero Siena, 1. 39100
Bolzano, Italy

2 April - 14 September 2022

Exhibition design and architecture Michael Kleine