

Press Release

Nonsense and Greguerías | Roberto Urbano **Opening: March 28, from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.** **March 28 – May 21, 2026**

In Roberto Urbano's second exhibition at the gallery, we present the project *Nonsense and Greguerías*, in which he proposes a dialogue between two seemingly illogical modes of thought—the dislate (nonsense) and the greguería—as tools for accessing dimensions of reality that escape ordinary reason. Both registers rely on a break with conventional logic—whether through absurdity, paradox, or humor—to reveal hidden or latent meanings.

In this context, the term dislate is linked primarily to the figure of Saint John of the Cross, the 16th-century Carmelite mystic and poet whose writing employs paradoxes and seemingly contradictory formulations to describe spiritual experience. In his best-known poems—Dark Night, Living Flame of Love, or Ascent of Mount Carmel—language constantly approaches the notion of emptiness, of radical stripping away, where the experience of the divine is articulated through nothingness.

The drawings in the exhibition stem from this mystical tradition. They repeatedly evoke ideas of verticality, ascension, and levitation—formal elements that recall the experience of spiritual elevation described in the writings of Saint John of the Cross.

From this framework, Urbano also proposes a personal dislate, understood as a critical and visual hypothesis linking the work of the Baroque painter Juan Sánchez Cotán with the Carmelite mystical tradition. In particular, the exhibition takes as its point of departure the still life known as Thistles and Carrots, held at the Museum of Fine Arts of Granada, one of the artist's most emblematic works.

The hypothesis underlying the project suggests that Sánchez Cotán's still lifes are not only formal investigations of space and light, but may also be read as a visual translation of Carmelite mysticism, and especially of the work of Saint John of the Cross. From this perspective, the compositional austerity, the isolation of objects suspended against a dark background, and the sense of silence and suspension can be understood as formal equivalents of the spiritual processes described in Ascent of Mount Carmel, Living Flame of Love, and Dark Night. Within this framework, nothingness—the void that surrounds and sustains the objects—becomes the true protagonist of the image.

In contrast to the mystical dislate, the second part of the project is structured around the greguería, understood here in relation to the Spanish literary tradition that uses humor, unexpected metaphor, or semantic displacement to generate new associations. In this case, the reference lies in the writing of Ramón del Valle-Inclán, whose work frequently explores the tension between the sacred, the grotesque, and the political.

Within this section, a second thematic axis emerges: the friction between the spiritual and political power—that is, the use of the religious or the mystical as an instrument of political legitimization or confrontation.

One of the works addresses this theme through a reinterpretation of the Roman sculpture known as the Apotheosis of Claudius, held at the Museo del Prado. Apotheoses were propagandistic representations in which a deceased Roman emperor was deified and shown ascending to Olympus. These images served a clear political function: the emperor who promoted the apotheosis established a symbolic continuity with his predecessor and reinforced his legitimacy before the Senate and the imperial elites.

In the sculpture presented in the exhibition, Roberto offers a formal reinterpretation of this classical motif. This intervention seeks to highlight the ways in which the spiritual can be instrumentalized by power, generating a kind of arpeggio between religion and politics.

The second work in this section arises from a personal experience during his stay in Guatemala. The piece relates to the history of Liberation Theology, a theological movement that emerged in Latin America in the second half of the 20th century, interpreting Christianity through the defense of the poor and social justice, and playing an important role in contexts of political repression.

During a project in which he worked alongside theologians associated with this movement, they received an anonymous phone call containing only one sentence: "The dog is loose." Historically, this message functioned as a warning during the harshest years of the Guatemalan armed conflict in the 1980s, when numerous religious figures and activists were persecuted under the regime of General Efraín Ríos Montt, responsible for one of the most violent phases of the conflict and later tried for genocide against the Maya population.

The call warned the recipients that they had less than seven days to leave the country. What was surprising was that the same phrase resurfaced in 2011, when Urbano was in Guatemala working on that project. At that time, Ríos Montt was being tried for past crimes, but his political party still held positions of power.

The work *The Dog* emerges from that experience and from the mental image that episode generated in the artist: a latent, invisible figure functioning as a metaphor for political fear and for the persistence of structures of violence even decades after the events.

Roberto Urbano holds a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts and a Diploma in Advanced Studies (DEA) in the doctoral program "Languages and Poetics in Contemporary Art" from the University of Granada. He is currently completing his Master's Degree in "Latin American Studies: Culture and Management," also at the University of Granada. He directed for several years an Art Brut workshop for people with functional diversity at a prestigious foundation in Granada. His artistic experience includes photographic and audiovisual work for the Juilliard School of Dance, collaborating with Héctor Zaraspe, Rudolf Nureyev's teacher in New York. Since 2001 he has exhibited his work individually and collectively on numerous occasions both nationally and internationally, in venues such as Espacio OTR in Madrid, SCAN – Spanish Contemporary Art Network Foundation in London, Zadok Gallery in Miami, Galerie 59 Rivoli in Paris, the iconic Santa Catalina Hall at the Ateneo de Madrid, and recently in the exhibition *Sculpture: Art of Ingenuity*, curated by Óscar Alonso Molina at the Palacio Condes de Gavia in Granada. He has been one of the artists selected by Txomin Badiola for his workshop "Exercising Distance, Testing Contact," part of the Visual Arts Program of the Directorate-General for Cultural Promotion of the Community of Madrid, titled Madrid 45.