

Press Release

Nonsense and Greguerías | Roberto Urbano

Opening: March 28, from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

March 28 – May 21, 2026

Galería Daniel Cuevas presents the second solo exhibition by artist Roberto Urbano, curated by Antonio A. Caballero Gálvez. The project *Dislates y Greguerías* is conceived as a field of tension between two forms of thought that operate at the margins of logic: the dislate (nonsense) and the greguería. Far from being understood as mere irrational deviations, both forms constitute devices of knowledge that suspend ordinary causality in order to open meaning toward what is not immediately evident. The project situates itself within a tradition that recognizes in language—when it breaks, folds, or contradicts itself—the possibility of accessing zones of experience that exceed discursive reason (Michel Foucault).

The exhibition unfolds from an eminently sculptural practice. The use of cement, iron, and zirconium paper is not merely a technical decision, but rather configures a material language in which weight, fragility, and resistance enter into tension. Surfaces erode, crack, and accumulate traces. Matter does not support the image; it conditions it, interrupts it, and at times makes it disappear. Sculpture thus appears not as a closed volume but as a process: accumulation, wear, and emergence.

The term dislate is linked here to the mystical writings of Saint John of the Cross, whose work constitutes one of the most radical examples of a language approaching its own limit. In texts such as *Dark Night*, *Living Flame of Love*, or *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, the experience of the divine is formulated through paradox, negation, and semantic emptying. As Georges Bataille has noted, mysticism does not describe a positive plenitude but an experience of loss, of the dissolution of the subject in a space of indeterminacy.

The works *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (2025), *Living Flame of Love I* (2025), *Dark Night* (2025), and *Canticle* (2025) situate themselves in continuity with this tradition. In them, the repetition of motifs such as verticality, ascension, or the emergence of minimal forms constitutes the material inscription of a spiritual economy of dispossession. The image tends toward its own disappearance—an operation that may be thought in relation to the “aesthetics of disappearance” formulated by Paul Virilio. In this context, the flame, the ascending gesture, or the barely suggested figure are not iconographies but thresholds: places where visibility becomes unstable.

Within this same framework, the project introduces a dislate as a critical hypothesis: the possibility of reading the painting of Juan Sánchez Cotán through the lens of Carmelite mysticism—specifically referencing the still life *Thistles and Carrots* (Sánchez Cotán, 1603–1627, Museum of Fine Arts of Granada). The compositional austerity, the isolation of elements, and the dominant presence of emptiness may be understood not only as formal decisions but as plastic equivalents of the “night” described by Saint John of the Cross. Emptiness ceases to be background and becomes the true agent of the image—what sustains it and, at the same time, destabilizes it.

Opposed to this regime of mystical dislate, the second part of the project is organized around the greguería as a form of semantic displacement. Here, the greguería operates as a machine of unexpected associations capable of generating friction between heterogeneous registers. In this section, a second conceptual axis emerges: the instrumentalization of the spiritual by political power. The exhibition revisits this idea to examine how images of transcendence have historically been used as devices of legitimation. In this sense, it may be read in continuity with Ramón del Valle-Inclán’s tradition of the esperpento, where the sacred, the grotesque, and the political appear inextricably intertwined.

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A second conceptual axis emerges in this section: the instrumentalization of the spiritual by political power. As Carl Schmitt has analyzed, many categories of political modernity can be understood as secularizations of theological concepts. The exhibition takes up this idea to examine how images of transcendence have historically been used as mechanisms of legitimation.

The sculpture *Apotheosis* (2025) is inscribed within this framework through the reinterpretation of classical models of imperial divinization, specifically the *Apotheosis of Claudius* (Museo del Prado). Whereas in Roman apotheoses the emperor's ascent functioned as a symbolic operation of continuity and power, here that gesture is strained: elevation becomes matter, weight, construction. The form does not conceal its artifice; it exposes it, revealing the ideological dimension inherent in every image of transcendence.

The triptych *Ríos Montt's Dog* (2025), meanwhile, introduces a contemporary and situated dimension within this same problematic. The work stems from an experience linked to the recent history of Guatemala and the contexts of political violence associated with the regime of Efraín Ríos Montt. The phrase "the dog is loose," used as a warning during the armed conflict, is reactivated here as an image. The dog does not appear as a stable representation but as a latent, fragmented, repeated figure. In this sense, it may be thought in relation to Jacques Derrida's notion of spectrality: a form of presence that is not exhausted in the visible, that acts through its instability. The work thus signals the persistence of structures of violence that do not disappear but transform, reappear, insist.

Taken as a whole, *Dislates y Greguerías* proposes an exploration of the limits of language—visual and verbal—as a place where mysticism, politics, and image intersect. Both the *dislate* and the *greguería* are not forms of evasion but critical strategies: ways of destabilizing the visible and opening experience to that which cannot be said directly.

Roberto Urbano holds a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts and a Diploma in Advanced Studies (DEA) within the doctoral program "Languages and Poetics in Contemporary Art" at 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. For several years, he directed 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 dance program, 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 Sala Santa Catalina at the Ateneo de Madrid, and recently in the exhibition *Sculpture: Art of Ingenuity*, curated by Oscar Alonso Molina at the Palacio Condes de Gabia 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.