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M A R I K O

the birth of a vision

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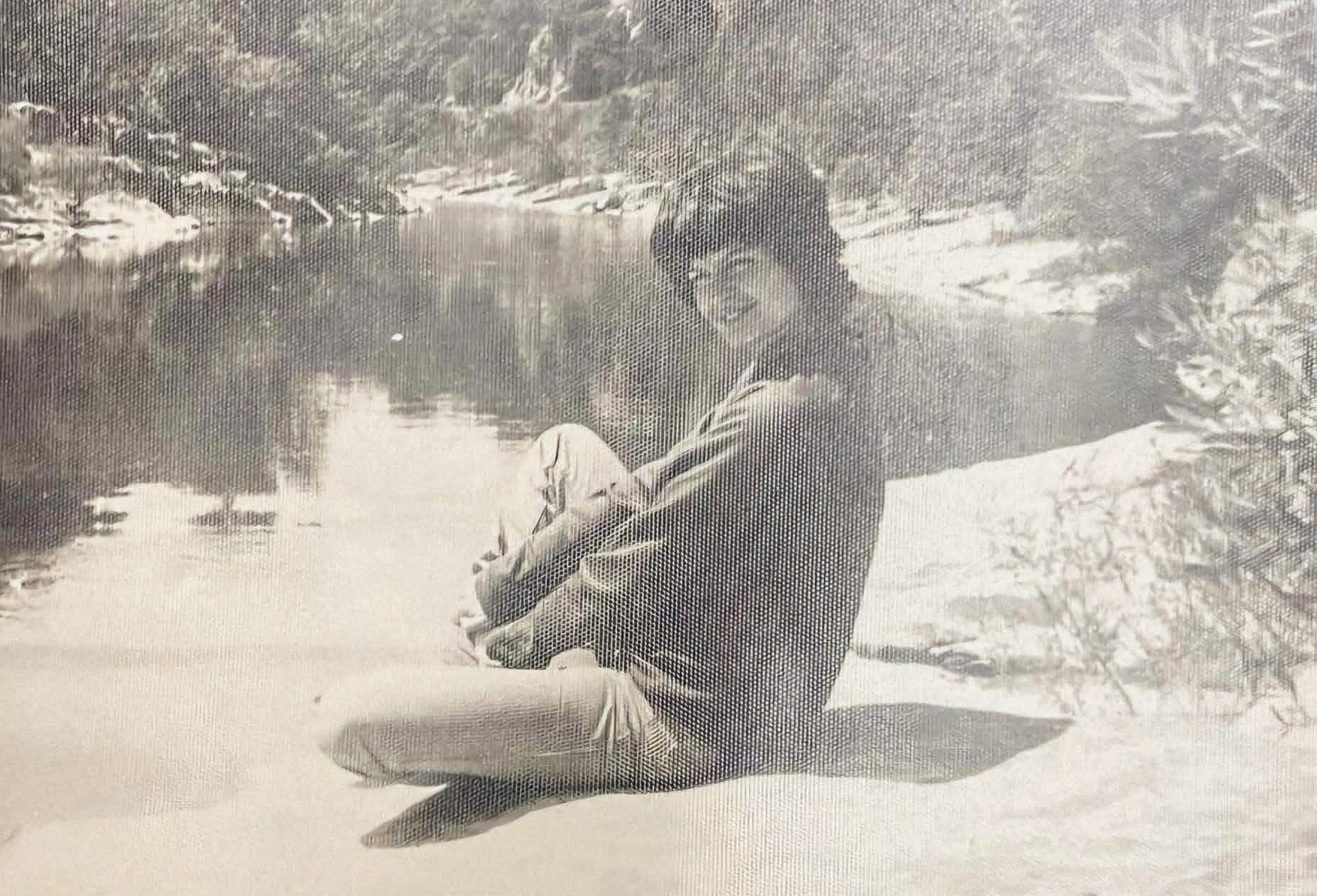
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MARIKO
the birth of a vision

critical text by
BENIAMINO LEVI



P R O D U C T I O N

Graphic Design: Latte Piu srl
Photography: Latte Piu srl, Pascale Cholette
Critical Text: Beniamino Levi
Print: First edition, 2026
Produced by: LART UNIVERSE in partnership with DALÍ UNIVERSE

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Mariko with "Takeshi"

GEOGRAPHIES OF DESTINY

Critical text by Beniamino Levi

The anthology dedicated to Mariko, the artistic name of Florence Combescure, presents itself as a critical device that deliberately escapes any chronological or geographical ordering, proposing instead a true mental cartography. Not a retrospective, therefore, but an anthology constructed according to the invisible trajectories of thought: meridians and parallels that do not traverse the physical world, but the artist's inner space.

In this context, the journey that structures Mariko's sculptural practice does not coincide with biographical data nor with the succession of places she has lived. Rather, it manifests as a process of mental crossing, a condition in which images, cultures and memories overlap independently of the time and space of their direct experience. The works do not belong to the place in which they were made, but to where the artist's mind was at the moment of their genesis. What follows is a constant dislocation: while the body is situated, the imagination migrates.

The curatorial core, evoked through the coordinates of Mombasa, does not act as a historical origin, but as a point of symbolic condensation. A decisive moment takes place in Kenya where, at just twelve years old, Mariko encounters clay work through the practice of the Maasai community, who shaped fantastic and symbolic figures. This encounter represents a revelation that goes beyond technical learning: it is the discovery of sculpture as an ancestral language, capable of connecting body, myth and community.

It is precisely at this moment that Mariko, still very young, creates her first sculpture: a primordial human figure made of clay and straw. A simple gesture, yet charged with meaning, marking the beginning of a path in which matter becomes an expressive medium and form takes life as the trace of an already deeply rooted imagination.

Mombasa becomes a threshold, a mental place from which an expanded geography radiates, one that includes Africa, Europe and Asia without ever fully coinciding with any of them. From this perspective, the exhibition organizes the works according to cultural and imaginative clusters, Kenya, Japan, Spain, and other traversed territories, not to reconstruct a real map, but to reveal how these influences activate, overlap, and transform within the artist's thought.

What emerges with force is a logic of contamination. Mariko's works do not merely reflect singular cultural identities, but construct an intermediate space in which seemingly distant elements coexist and hybridize. Forms that recall the monumentality and symbolic strength of African art intertwine with the stylization and suspended tension of Eastern aesthetics, generating figures that elude any univocal classification. It is within this "in-between", between Africa, Asia, and Europe, between the archaic and the contemporary, that her research finds its coherence.

Within this dynamic, the female figure assumes a structural centrality, not as a narrative subject, but as a generative and symbolic principle. The women sculpted by Mariko traverse all the geographies of her work, embodying a constant tension between strength and discipline, presence and interiority. In them is reflected the same ambivalence contained in the name "Mariko," a "warrior geisha" that introduces a fundamental critical dimension: the geisha not as an ornamental figure, but as a complex cultural device, defined by control of gesture, resistance, and awareness.

This duality translates into bodies that do not describe, but condense: compact surfaces, suspended postures, faces that retain a stratified memory.

Matter becomes the place where this tension manifests most clearly. Far from a purely technical approach, Mariko's sculptural practice takes on an almost ritual dimension.

Stoneware, bronze, stone, often intersected with industrial inserts, are not mere supports, but active substances, capable of holding and returning the gesture.

Form is not imposed, but revealed: each sculpture appears as the result of a process of unveiling, in which matter preserves the traces of a moving thought.

In this sense, even the introduction of mechanical or metallic elements does not create rupture, but amplifies the field of tension between organic and artificial, between archaic memory and contemporaneity. The surfaces, often marked by dark patinas, contribute to this construction: black does not close the form, but activates it, becoming the space in which light emerges and vibrates.

A further level of interpretation opens in relation to art history and its personal resonances. Mariko herself has often declared her connection to Salvador Dalí, evoking the gesture of "breathing the air" of figures as a practice of imaginative immersion. This reference does not translate into formal citation, but into an attitude: the ability to traverse places as mental spaces, to activate them as devices of vision.

As in Dalí, here too the real is never given, but continuously transfigured.

The exhibition thus constructs itself as a system of relations rather than a linear path. The meridians and parallels evoked in the title do not delimit, but connect: they are lines of tension that run through the works, bringing into dialogue different cultures, times and imaginaries. Each sculpture becomes a point of intersection, a node where lived experiences, internalized memories, and symbolic projections meet.

More than narrating a story, this exhibition project makes visible a condition: that of a thought that refuses to be fixed, that constantly moves between real places and inner territories.

It is within this mobility, mental before geographical, that Mariko's practice finds its critical force, configuring itself as a reflection on the very possibility of inhabiting the world through matter.

And it is precisely in this continuous migration between vision and form that the deepest core of her research becomes clear: art does not appear as a contingent choice, but as an inscribed trajectory, a direction already present, even when not yet visible. For Mariko, every crossing, geographical, cultural, or interior, only brings her closer to what was already destined to emerge.

From this perspective, destiny is not an externally imposed endpoint, but an internal force that orients and constantly returns one to oneself: no deviation is loss, no distance is true disorientation. If one is destined to a form, to a language, to a gesture, that gesture will inevitably find its fulfilment.

Thus, in matter as in thought, what must happen happens. Art, for Mariko, is nothing other than the place where this destiny takes form.

artworks's map

AFRICA

Ivory Coast



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USA



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FUSION

Europe - Asia - Africa



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Asia - Europe



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Africa

IVORY COAST
MAURITIUS
KENYA

For Mariko, Africa is the motherland, the original place where her gaze was formed and her relationship with matter first began. It is a space experienced in childhood as an intense, sensory encounter, where earth, bodies and rituals impressed themselves upon her as foundational images. A decisive moment took place in Kenya when, at the age of twelve, she came into contact with clay modelling within the Maasai community, where ritual figures and imaginary beings were shaped by hand. It was there that sculpture revealed itself as a primary language, inseparable from gesture, the body and the collective dimension.

In those years, Africa appeared to her as a living, magnetic presence: a land of ancient rituals, powerful women and ornaments charged with symbols, where every form seemed to hold an invisible force. "It was a land both wild and sacred, where everything seemed to have a soul and a voice," Mariko recalls of her childhood.

From this experience came an irreversible choice: to devote herself to sculpture as both destiny and inner necessity.

AFRICA THUS REMAINS A SENSORY AND SYMBOLIC ORIGIN, THE PLACE WHERE MATTER DOES NOT MERELY REPRESENT THE WORLD, BUT BRINGS IT INTO BEING.



TITLE: CONTRO-BASSE
YEAR: 2019
DIMENSIONS: H 100, L 27, P 23 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE



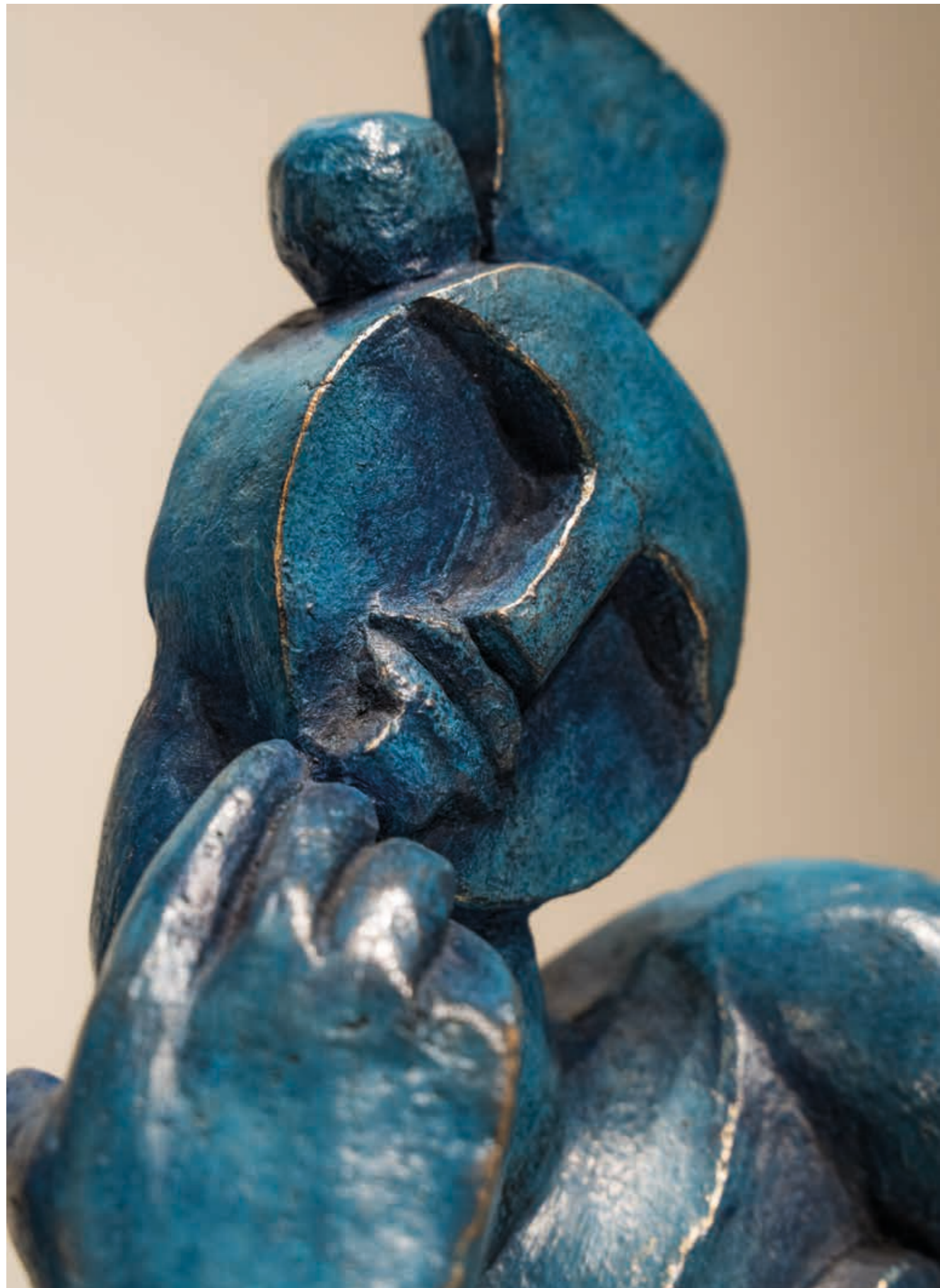
TITLE: AMAZONE
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 63, L 60, P 68 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS



“Black Amazon” draws from the African imagery encountered by Mariko, evoking the women of Abidjan’s markets, proud, self-assured and full of immediate vitality. The figure, composed yet alert, holds this energy within a compact and silent form, where the smile is subtle and inward. Suspended between strength and surrender, the body becomes a site of memory and concentration, expressing a presence that bridges everyday life and an archetypal dimension.



TITLE: AMAZONE
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 63, L 60, P 68 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS



TITLE: FLORA
YEAR: 2018
DIMENSIONS: H 27, L 40, P 32 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE



TITLE: THALIE
YEAR: 2015
DIMENSIONS: H 60, L 18, P 22 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE

26



TITLE: NINA - LA JEUNE FILLE À L'OISEAU
YEAR: 2017
DIMENSIONS: H 80, L 20, P 20 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS

27



TITLE: LA FEMME À LA GUITARE
YEAR: 2017
DIMENSIONS: H 70, L 80 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS

28

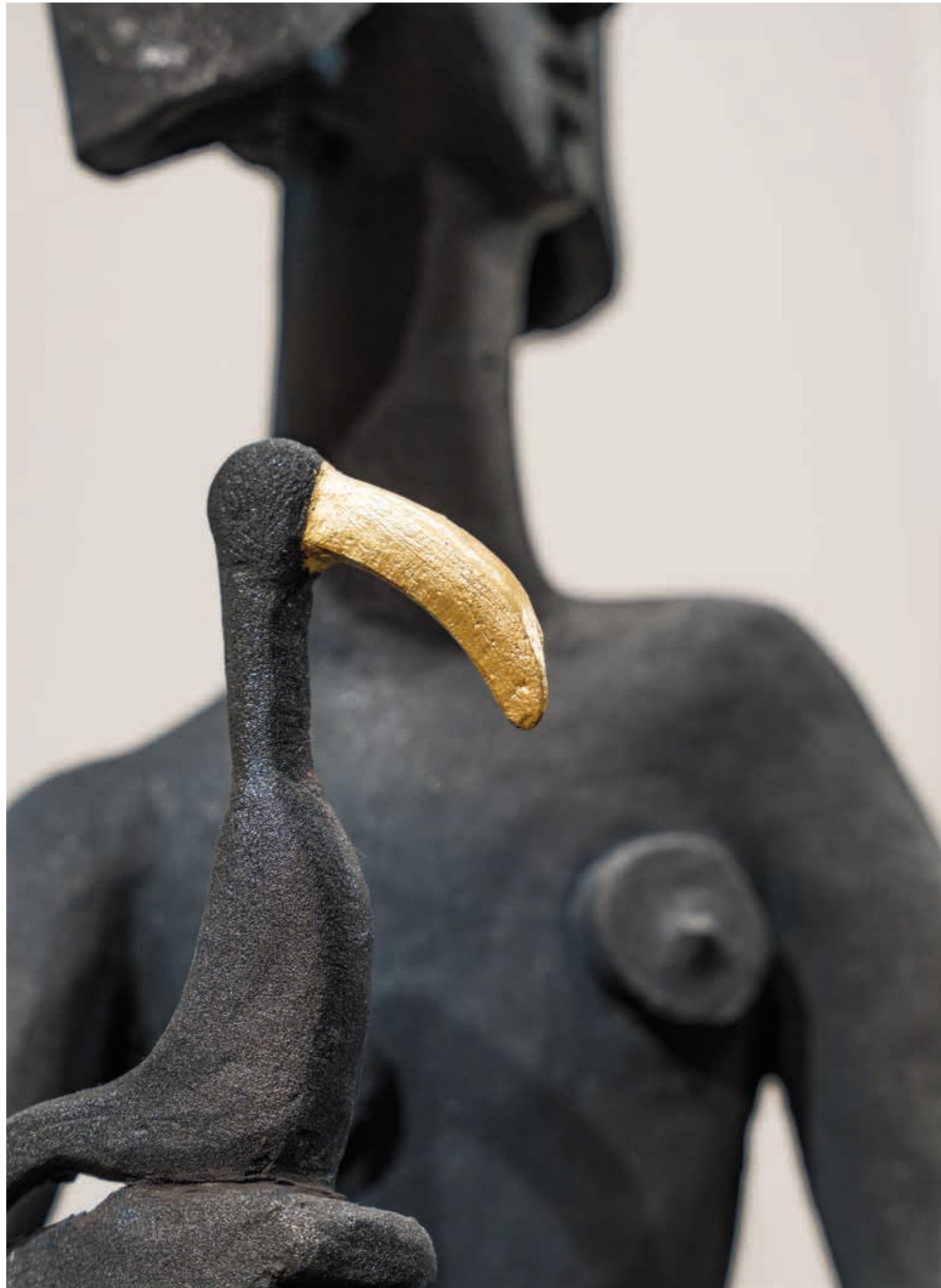


TITLE: VIOLONCELLISTE
YEAR: 2017
DIMENSIONS: H 32, L 45, P 22 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE

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TITLE: CYBÈLE
YEAR: 2015
DIMENSIONS: H 40, L 20 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE



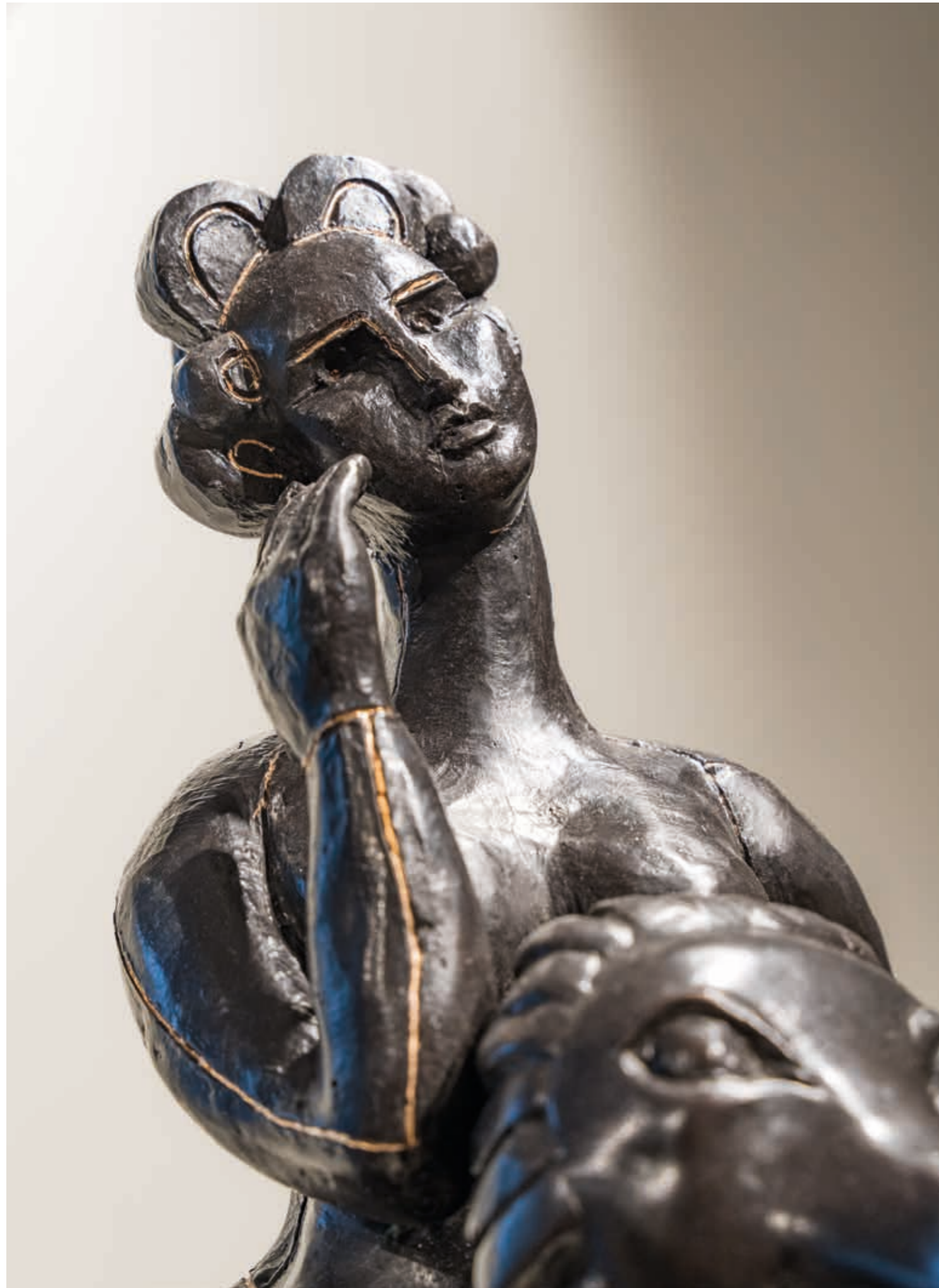
TITLE: LA CAVALIERE
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 70, L 34, P 45 CM
MATERIAL: TERRACOTTA

In *Miyako the Horsewoman*, the artist engages with imagery inspired by Africa, where form is shaped through synthesis, symbolism and expressive reduction.

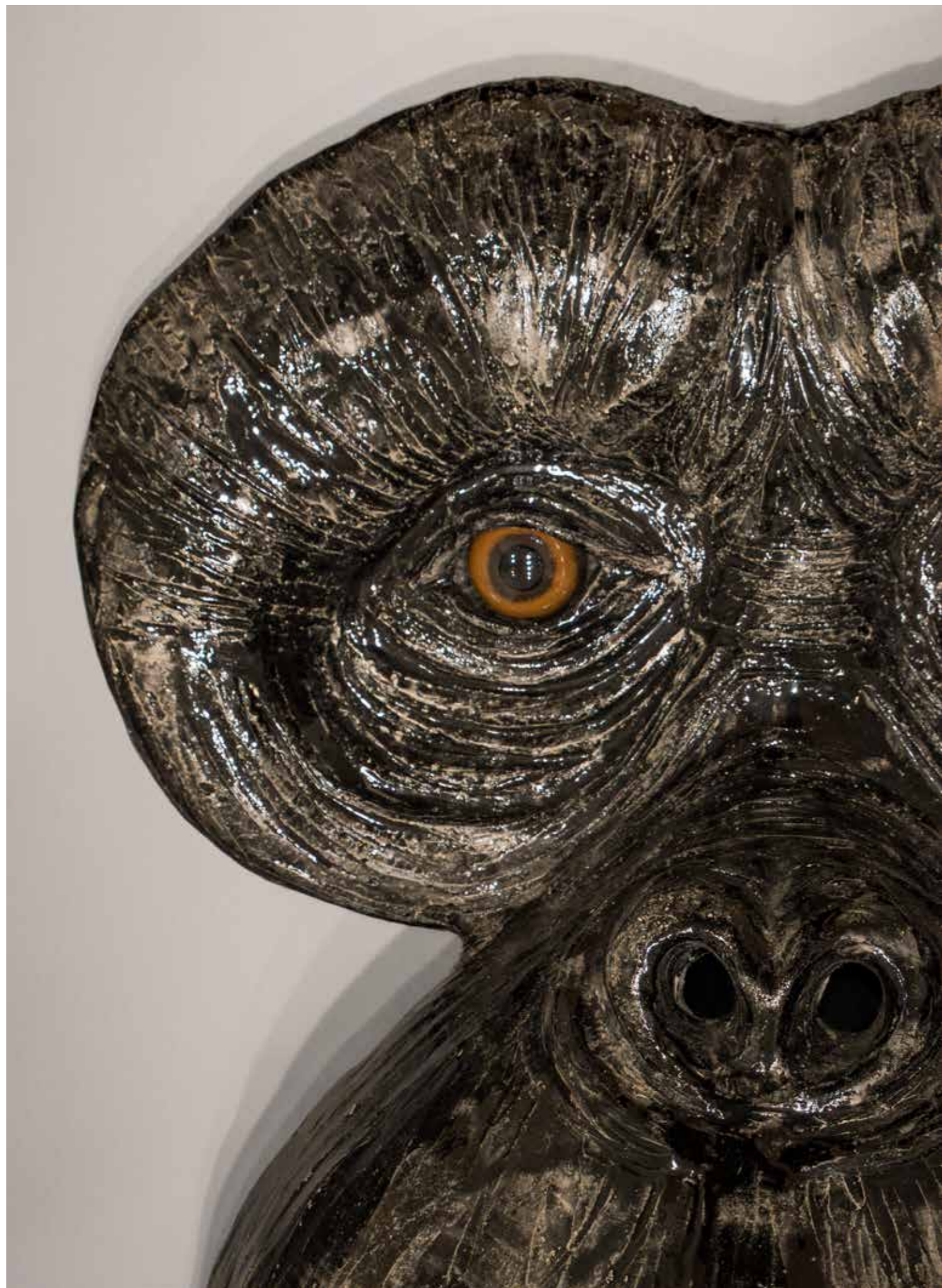
The horse reflects references to African and so-called “primitive” art, with a compact, essential and rhythmically structured presence. The female figure is poised and controlled, balancing stability and grace, and commands the horse with natural authority. In her hand, she raises a large hornbill, adding a further symbolic layer tied to balance and the interplay of forces within the composition.



TITLE: LA CAVALIERE
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 70, L 34, P 45 CM
MATERIAL: TERRACOTTA



TITLE: DODO
YEAR: 2020
DIMENSIONS: H 58, L 40, P 34 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE



TITLE: ORANG-OUTANG
YEAR: 2020
DIMENSIONS: H 100, L 100, P 40 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS

Asia

JAPAN

In Japanese culture, form is never separate from the gesture that produces it. Every movement is governed by a discipline that does not aim at display, but at precision, measure and the continuity of time.

The figure of the geisha belongs to this universe: not a decorative icon, but the expression of a complex knowledge, founded on the training of the body, the mastery of movement and a conception of beauty as an inner construction. Her role is not one of representation, but of controlled presence, in which every gesture becomes language and every silence becomes part of the form. “Geishas are not courtesans. They create another world, a secret one... a place of beauty alone. To be a geisha means to be an artist, a living form that manifests itself as a work of art in motion.” In this vision, beauty coincides with discipline, and life with the construction of a form. It is within this horizon that Mariko is situated. Her name arises as the recognition of an already present tension: “warrior geisha”, a definition that holds together control and rupture, measure and disobedience.

Not a contradiction, but a single energy expressed in opposite directions.

ASIA THUS BECOMES FOR HER A MENTAL SPACE IN WHICH FORM DOES NOT DERIVE FROM IMPULSE, BUT FROM A SLOW CONSTRUCTION OF PRESENCE, WHERE GESTURE BECOMES CHARGED WITH INTENTION AND THE BODY IS TRANSFORMED INTO LANGUAGE.



TITLE: GRAND MITSOUKO
YEAR: 2022
DIMENSIONS: H 114, L40, P 40 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS AND GOLD LEAVES

MITSOUKO, CHILD OF LIGHT, TALKING TO A BIRD

Mitsouko means **child of light**. I wanted to express all the innocence and fragility and the determination of a child discovering the world.

The deer antlers represent the forest, exploration.

The aviator glasses represent elevation.

Mitsouko, child of light, talking with a bird.



TITLE: GRAND MITSOUKO
YEAR: 2022
DIMENSIONS: H 114, L40, P 40 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS AND GOLD LEAVES



TITLE: FEMME AUX OISEAUX
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 72, L 55, P 10 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE



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TITLE: GEISHA
YEAR: 2021
DIMENSIONS: H 65, L 36, P 22 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS



TITLE: MIYAKO KIMONO
YEAR: 2022
DIMENSIONS: H 71, L 63, P 30 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS AND GOLD LEAVES

In Miyako Kimono, the geisha is enveloped in sweeping folds of fabric that shape her presence, turning the kimono into a structure that defines rather than reveals the body. The drapery becomes a system of visual and gestural codes rooted in Japanese tradition.

Despite the apparent weight and structure of the garment, the figure retains a sense of lightness, internalizing tradition rather than displaying it. It is absorbed into posture, into the precision of movement, into the quiet continuity of stance. In this balance between surface and depth, the kimono becomes both a visible form and the trace of an embodied cultural heritage, expressed through the body without ever being overtly declared.



TITLE: MIYAKO KIMONO
YEAR: 2022
DIMENSIONS: H 71, L 63, P 30 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS AND GOLD LEAVES



TITLE: MIYAKO
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 90, L 26, P 36 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS



TITLE: MIYAKO CAVALIERE
YEAR: 2022
DIMENSIONS: H 56, L 40, P 40 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS AND GOLD LEAVES



TITLE: MIYAKO CRISTAL
YEAR: 2022
DIMENSIONS: H 60, L 30, P 30 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS AND GOLD LEAVES



TITLE: MIYAKO HERON
YEAR: 2022
DIMENSIONS: H 68, L 30, P 30 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS AND GOLD LEAVES

In Miyako Heron, the female figure and the bird are intertwined as inseparable presences, deeply rooted in Japanese aesthetics. Both embody a language of restrained grace, formal balance and quiet intensity, where every gesture is reduced to its essence and guided by discipline.

The heron, symbolizing longevity, purity, and elegance, enters into dialogue with the figure of the geisha, situated within a space of ritual harmony and controlled movement. The sculpture creates a symbolic continuity between human and animal, where identities begin to merge.



TITLE: MIYAKO HERON
YEAR: 2022
DIMENSIONS: H 68, L 30, P 30 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS AND GOLD LEAVES



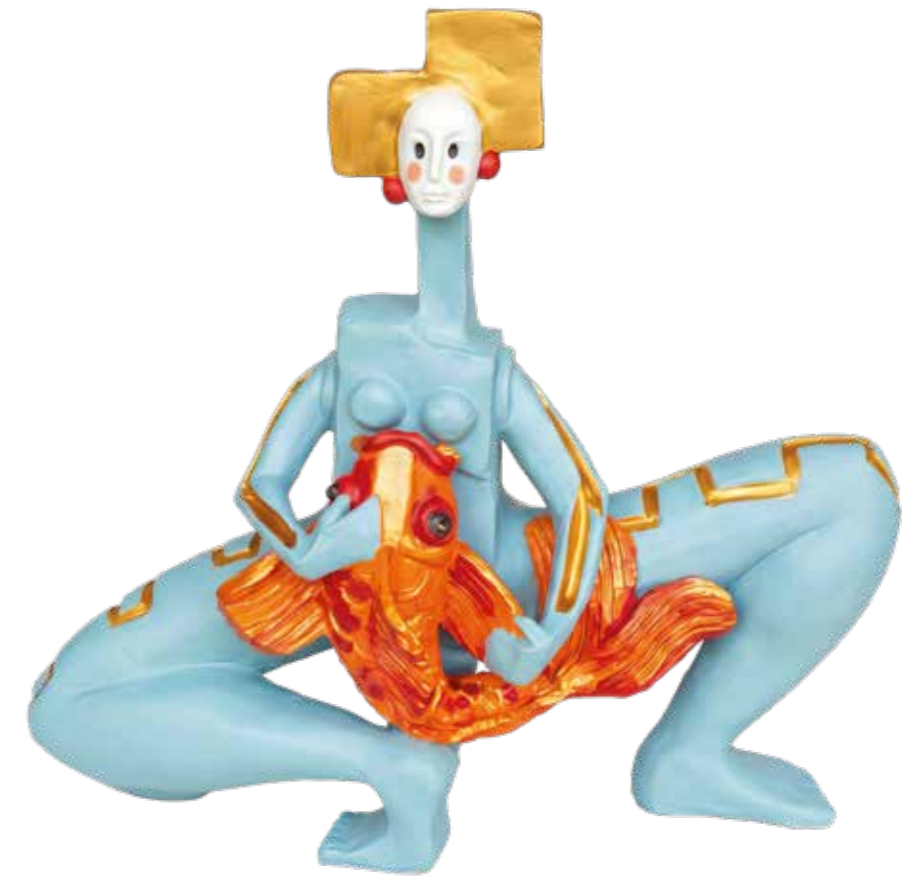
TITLE: AIKO
YEAR: 2016
DIMENSIONS: H 40 CM
MATERIAL: GLAZED CERAMICS



TITLE: YURIKO
YEAR: 2016
DIMENSIONS: H 40 CM
MATERIAL: GLAZED CERAMICS



TITLE: OSAKA GEISHA
YEAR: 2016
DIMENSIONS: H 70, L 50 CM
MATERIAL: GLAZED CERAMICS



TITLE: MIYAKO POISSON
YEAR: 2019
DIMENSIONS: H 40, L 60 CM
MATERIAL: GLAZED CERAMICS

Europe

SPAIN
FRANCE
GREECE

Europe appears in Mariko's research as a space of cultural sedimentation, where matter encounters the memory of the classical and the persistence of myth. Not an origin, but a place of reinterpretation, where ancient forms become a contemporary language.

Greece represents the horizon of ideal form: an imaginary in which the body, proportion and myth construct a visual grammar that remains active, capable of crossing time and re-emerging in the contemporary world as a symbolic structure.

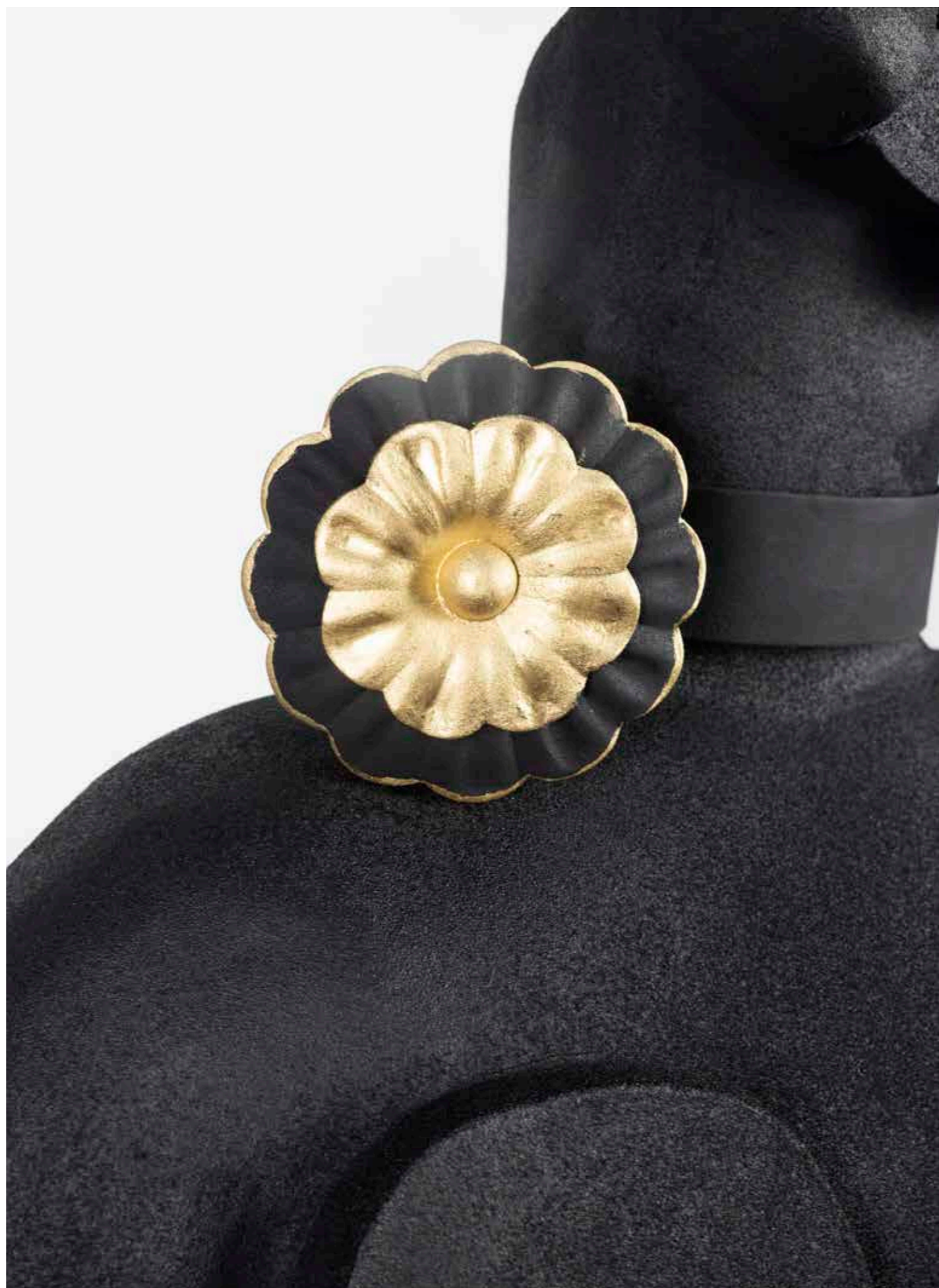
Spain, by contrast, introduces a more sensory and visionary dimension, linked to music, corporeality and an artistic tradition in which reality and imagination overlap. It is also the land of Salvador Dalí, a fundamental figure in Mariko's imagination, for his ability to transform reality into vision, and vision into matter.

In this context, Europe becomes a space of return and transformation.

THE PLACE WHERE ANCIENT MYTH AND MODERNITY INTERTWINE, GIVING FORM TO A CONTINUITY BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT THAT NOURISHES THE CONSTRUCTION OF HER SCULPTURAL LANGUAGE.



TITLE: FEMME GUITARE
YEAR: 2021
DIMENSIONS: H 59, L 39, P 19 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE



TITLE: MENINE
YEAR: 2020
DIMENSIONS: H 150, L 123 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS



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TITLE: MENINE AU HOMARD
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 57, L 37, P 40 CM
MATERIAL: TERRACOTTA



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TITLE: MINOTAURE
YEAR: 2018
DIMENSIONS: H 77, L 25, P 18 CM
MATERIAL: TERRACOTTA

LA DANCE

The sculptural works by Mariko that evoke a figure resembling a minotaur actually stem from a more complex and layered reflection. Rather than referencing the mythological Minotaur, these forms emerge from a symbolic fusion of two central figures in Spanish tradition: the bull and the matador. The origin of this vision can be traced back to an experience the artist had in Spain, while attending a bullfight with a friend. On that occasion, the ritual structure of the corrida was explained to her, particularly its final moment.

Mariko was deeply struck by the choreographic dimension of this conclusion: on one side, the matador, performing a kind of dance before delivering the final blow; on the other, the bull, whose charge can also be interpreted as a primal, instinctive dance.

From this tension arises her hybrid figure. These sculptures condense both the bull and the matador into a single body, merging victim and executioner, strength and control, instinct and technique. It is not merely a depiction of conflict, but rather of an inevitable, almost ritual intertwining. These “minotaurs” a term used only in an evocative sense thus become the symbol of a macabre dance, the final act of the corrida, where the two protagonists merge into a single gesture. More than a mythological reference, this is a tribute to the corrida itself: not as spectacle, but as ritual, as a tragic choreography in which life and death converge.



TITLE: MINOTAURE
 YEAR: 2018
 DIMENSIONS: H 77, L 25, P 18 CM
 MATERIAL: TERRACOTTA



TITLE: NAPOP
YEAR: 2021
DIMENSIONS: H 25,5 CM
MATERIAL: RESIN

80

**NAPOP WOULD NEVER
HAVE COME TO LIFE
WITHOUT THE
COLLABORATION
BETWEEN MARIKO AND
FABB WEBMASTER...**

Mariko in collaboration with Fabb Webmaster created "Napop" in 2021 to mark the 200th anniversary of Napoleon Bonaparte's death.

Inspired by the world of Playmobil, the work transforms the historical figure of Napoleon into a pop, playful, and unexpected icon. As Mariko herself recounts, he greatly enjoyed creating it, and that sense of freedom and amusement is fully reflected in the piece. Deeply connected to Corsica and to Napoleon's legacy, Napop is an artwork that feels both entertaining and meaningful, where irony, beauty, and historical memory come together in a striking contemporary form.

Napop would never have come to life without the collaboration between Mariko and Fabb Webmaster, whose contribution was essential to the realization of the work. Their artistic relationship was already deeply established through years of collaboration on Mariko's Mechanical Horses, developed within an important project in Saudi Arabia.

This long-standing creative partnership gave birth to Napop, a highly distinctive and unconventional artwork that perfectly combines technical expertise, artistic vision, and a playful contemporary spirit. Drawing inspiration from the iconic universe of the famous Playmobil figures, the sculpture transforms a legendary historical character into a fascinating pop symbol, balancing irony, craftsmanship, and cultural memory in a truly unique way.





TITLE: LEDA
YEAR: 2021
DIMENSIONS: H 35, L 68, P 35 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS

Inspired by the myth of Leda and the swan, Mariko reinterprets the subject through a process of cultural transformation. The classical reference dissolves into a hybrid form, where Greek imagery merges with Eastern aesthetics, giving rise to a female figure suspended between tradition and metamorphosis.



TITLE: LEDA
YEAR: 2021
DIMENSIONS: H 35, L 68, P 35 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS

The Americas

USA

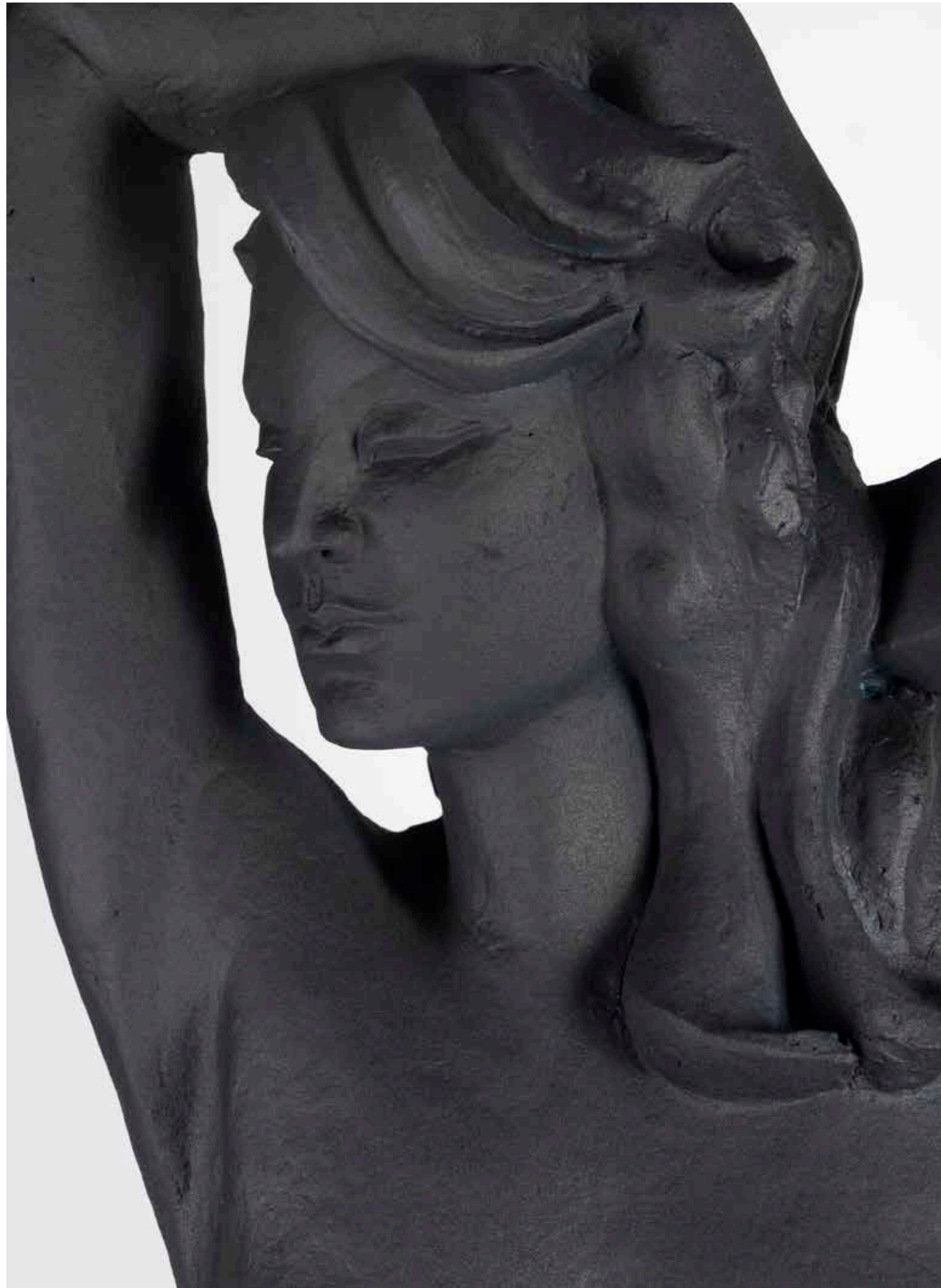
America takes shape in Mariko's research as the territory in which the image achieves its own autonomy, emancipating itself from its real referent and becoming the language of the "seventh art": cinema. Here, reality is not simply represented, but constructed through editing, light and pose, in a continuous transformation of the gaze.

Within this horizon, cinematic culture contributes to defining a new grammar of the body and of presence.

The female image becomes an ideal surface and a visual construction, suspended between desire and representation.

The pin-up, born as an illustration and later absorbed into the Hollywood imaginary, passes through this transformation: from graphic figure to cinematic icon, until becoming the symbol of a shared aesthetic linked to lightness, optimism and the rebirth of post-war America. In this landscape of images, between cinema and female icons, Mariko recognises an already existing archive of forms and postures, a visual lexicon belonging to collective culture. It is precisely from this repertoire that the need for transfiguration arises: not to replicate these images, but to pass through them, removing them from the surface in order to return them to a more interior dimension.

"I WANTED TO GIVE THESE BEAUTIES A FACE OF MY OWN, AS THOUGH THEY WERE MEMORY RATHER THAN MERE IMAGE."



TITLE: GILDA
YEAR: 2019
DIMENSIONS: H 183, L 99, P 74 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS

RITA HAYWORTH
GILDA

Evoking Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*, the sculpture recalls the American imaginary of cinematic sensuality: a body shaped by the gaze, asserting itself as a physical presence and a point of visual attraction within the space.

An absolute archetype of elegance, at once controlled and seductive, this image profoundly shaped twentieth-century visual culture. The actress's face, having become a global icon, was even reproduced on an American atomic bomb, transforming a symbol of beauty into an image associated with power and destruction.



Fusion

In this space, geographies cease to be coordinates and become living matter. Africa, Asia, Europe and America no longer follow one another, but intertwine, giving rise to forms in which every sense of belonging is crossed and transformed.

The figures are not located in any precise place: they inhabit an “in-between”, an intermediate space in which identities overlap and are continually redefined. Bodies, faces and postures embrace different memories, constructing presences that do not belong to a single culture, but to the relationship that unites them.

It is within this dynamic that the work becomes a synthesis: not fusion as addition, but as transformation, where each element loses its boundaries in order to become part of a unique language.

“EVERY PLACE I HAVE PASSED THROUGH HAS LEFT A TRACE IN ME AS AN ARTIST. EVERYTHING RESURFACES, MINGLES, WITHOUT EVER LEAVING ME.”



TITLE: SEVEN SAMURAI
YEAR: 2019
DIMENSIONS: H 120, L 30, P 50 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE



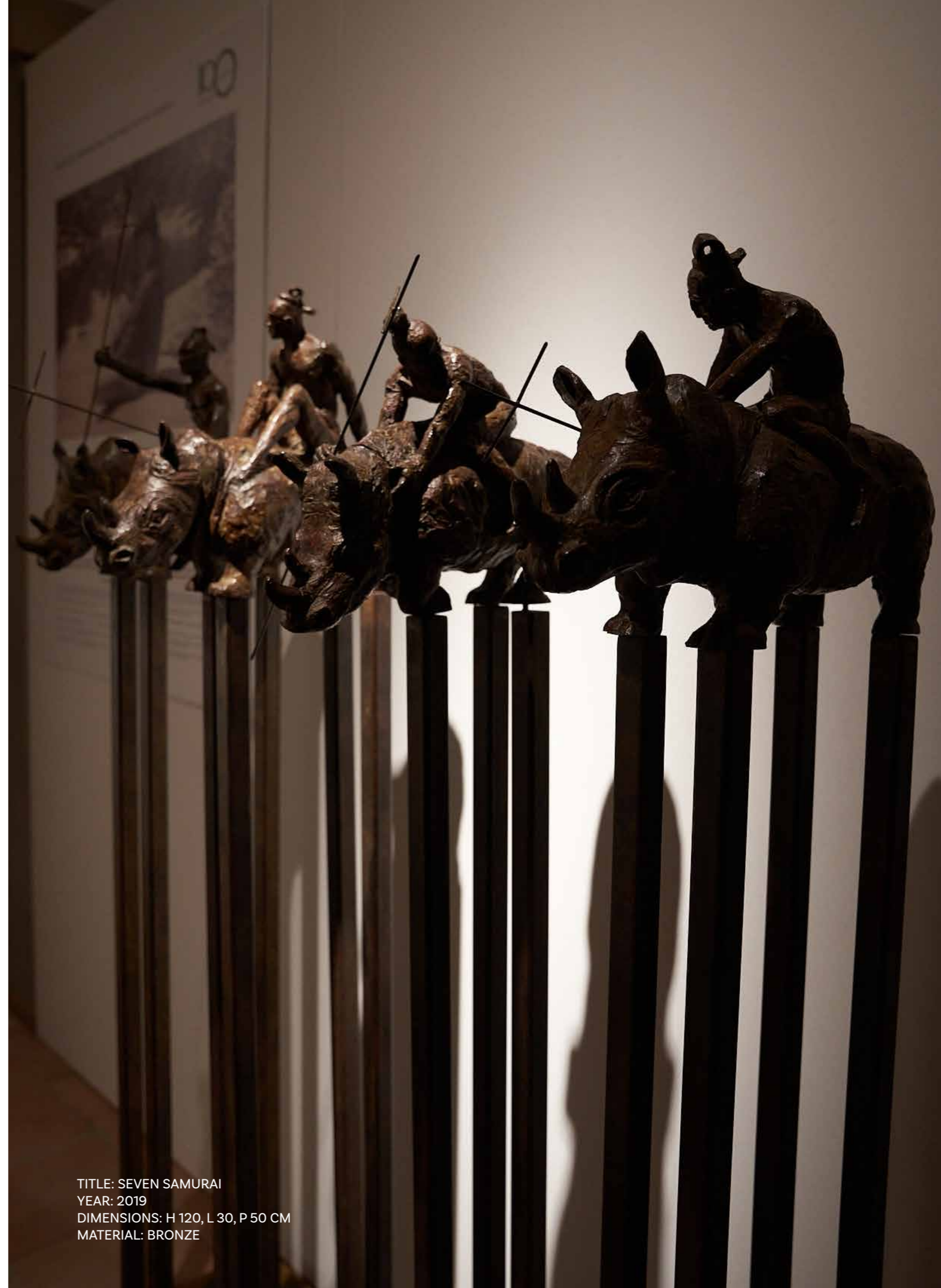
Seven Samurai

In the Samurai series, Mariko builds a symbolic dialogue between three continents, creating a visual and spiritual bridge between cultures that may appear distant from one another.

Japan emerges through the figure of the samurai, guardian of ancient traditions and profound inner discipline; Africa takes shape in the rhinoceros, a symbol of primordial strength, ancestral memory, and connection to the earth; Europe is evoked by the cross, an emblem of spirituality, history, and cultural identity.

These elements do not simply coexist within the same work: they intertwine and respond to one another, giving life to a universal vision of the human being. Mariko suggests that, beyond geographical and cultural differences, there are shared values, courage, spiritual quest, respect, sacrifice, capable of uniting the East, Africa, and Europe within a single symbolic narrative.

The number seven, chosen for the series, also takes on a deeply evocative meaning: it recalls the final day of creation, a symbol of fulfilment, perfection, and universal harmony. The samurai thus becomes an initiatory and borderless figure, a bridge between continents, myth, and spirituality, embodying a dialogue between civilizations that transcends time and space.



TITLE: SEVEN SAMURAI
 YEAR: 2019
 DIMENSIONS: H 120, L 30, P 50 CM
 MATERIAL: BRONZE



TITLE: MAIKO
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 43, L 52, P 32 CM
MATERIAL: BRONZE



TITLE: BLUE AMAZONE
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 50, L 35, P 43 CM
MATERIAL: TERRACOTTA

For Mariko, this sculpture represents an “African pause”: a moment of inner stillness that does not interrupt the journey, but turns it into an act of listening. It becomes a mental threshold where time expands and the figure opens itself to silent dialogue.

The hornbill resting on the shoulder introduces a symbolic presence that conveys protection, vigilance, and connection. In many African traditions, this bird is seen as a guardian and mediator, capable of linking the human realm to a wider spiritual dimension.



TITLE: BLUE AMAZONE
YEAR: 2023
DIMENSIONS: H 50, L 35, P 43 CM
MATERIAL: TERRACOTTA



TITLE: AMPHITRITE
YEAR: 2019
DIMENSIONS: H 45, L 35, P 35 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS

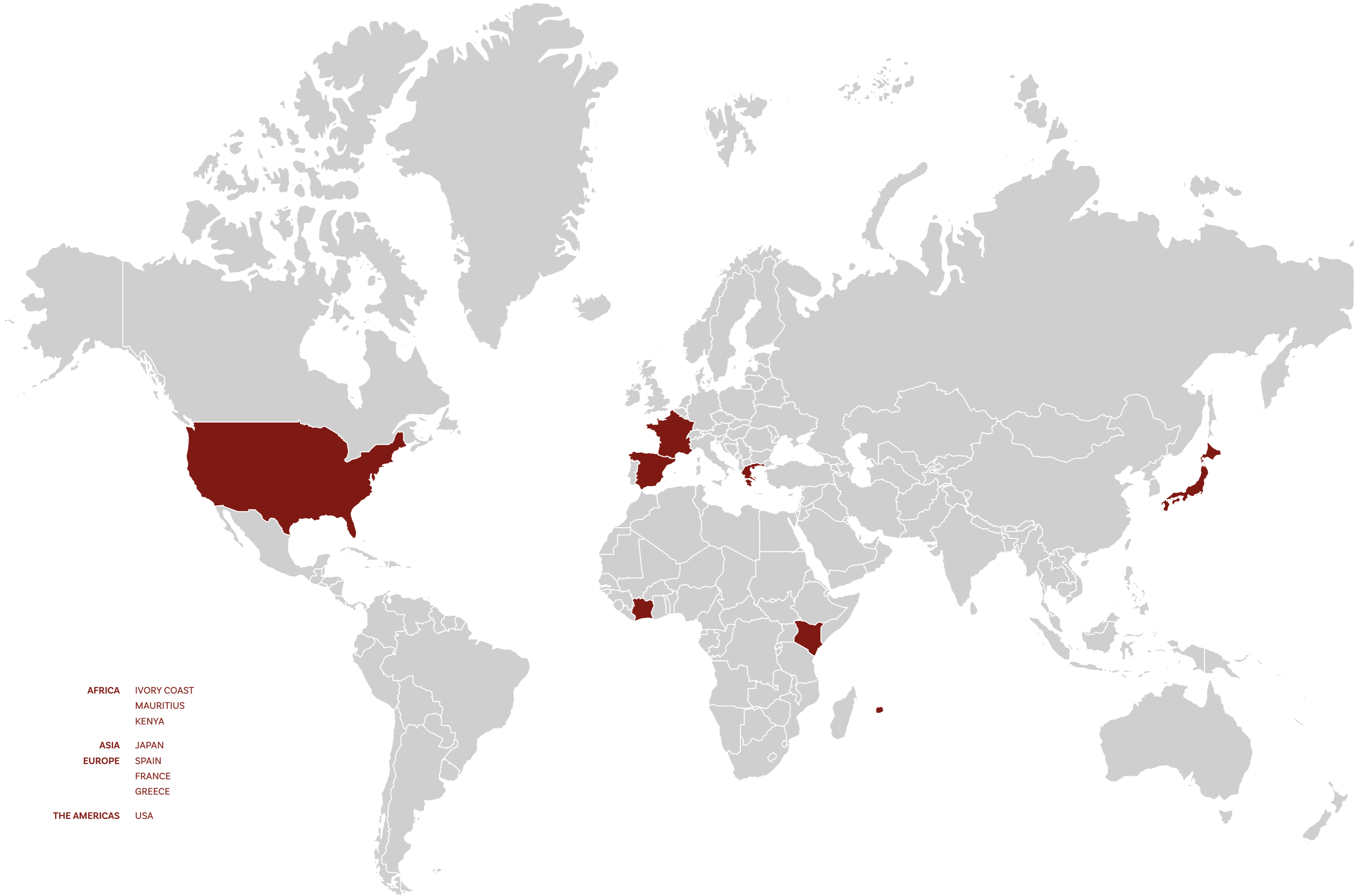
106



107



TITLE: BLUE LUNA
YEAR: 2019
DIMENSIONS: H 46 ,L 20, P 30 CM
MATERIAL: CERAMICS

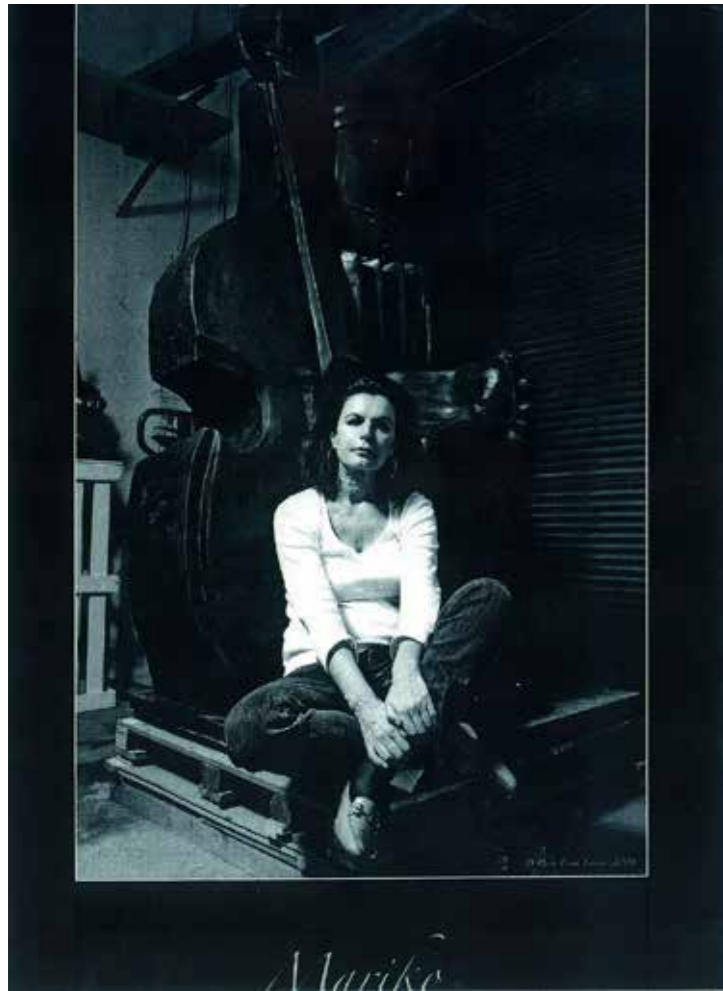


- AFRICA IVORY COAST
 MAURITIUS
 KENYA
- ASIA JAPAN
- EUROPE SPAIN
 FRANCE
 GREECE
- THE AMERICAS USA

“No one escapes their origins or their lived experience. From her childhood in Madagascar, Mariko has been fascinated by the magic of earth and the hands that shape legendary figures. Every journey, every encounter, every material becomes for her a source of inspiration, giving rise to a unique vision: to create sculptures where emotion, myth, and life converge.”

Mariko





Mariko

À PROPOS DE MOI

About Me

Mariko

ORIGINS AND ARTISTIC JOURNEY

Born Florence Combescure, Mariko grew up between Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion, Kenya, Ivory Coast and Corsica. This nomadic childhood shaped her gaze and her instinctive relationship with matter. In Kenya, she learned from an early age the art of shaping clay with the Maasai and, at just 14, decided to become an artist.

In Ivory Coast, the director of the Beaux-Arts in Abidjan guided her through personalized teaching before she later joined the École des Beaux-Arts in Montpellier. It was there that a Japanese friend renamed her Mariko, “the warrior geisha”, revealing the strength and determination that inhabit her creative gesture.

This period also marked her discovery of tauromachy, which sparked a profound reflection on struggle, the fusion of man and animal, and the emergence of powerful figures such as the Minotaur, central symbols in her sculptural universe.

MATTER, MYTH, AND THE ACT OF CREATION

Mariko works with stoneware, bronze, stone, and resin, sometimes incorporating reclaimed materials that she assembles and welds to enrich her sculptures. Stoneware, fired at very high temperatures, holds a particular place in her practice, both for its strength and its symbolic charge.

For her, modelling is a demiurgic act. Earth, primordial matter and the flesh of the world, becomes the vessel of myth and imagination. Each sculpture is an intimate ritual, a love story lived throughout the creative process, before being released through patina, often black, which reveals the light.

Her works intertwine cultures and continents: Africa, Japan, and Europe enter into dialogue through Samurai, Geishas, Minotaurs, dreamlike giraffes, and the palaver tree. Through the movement of her figures, Mariko traces her path as an artist and offers the viewer a dream, a myth, a story, speaking to the heart, the only true source of art.

Through the movement of her figures, Mariko traces her path as an artist and offers the viewer a dream, a myth, a story speaking to the heart, the only true source of art.



Mariko from the Culture Expo Magazine



Mariko from the Balthazar, Special Femme Magazine

other artworks



Mariko working on "Griffon"

GRIFFON

Commission for a sculpture for the parisian interior designer, for a castle.



Mariko working on "Monument aux morts guerre de 14/18"

LE SOLDAT

The Soldier is a work by Santa Lucia that depicts monuments to the fallen.



Mariko working on "Arion"

ARION

Sculpture commissioned by CFC Développement for the entrance of a building located in a modern area of the city of Montpellier. Arion depicts a winged horse, a symbol of vitality and movement, and is known as "the artist who brings good luck." The sculpture is made of resin with an internal metal structure and finished with a UV-resistant polyurethane coating, designed to ensure durability outdoors.

LES NAIĀDES

Commission for a sculpture for the city of Lamalou-les-bains. Sculptures made of resin because they are fixed on an sncf bridge. "The Naiads" are six meters long. The weight of the sculptures fixed to the bridge arches was regulated. Sculpture at the entrance to the city.



"Le Naiades"

LES MUSICIENS

Commission for a sculpture for the city of Sarcelles. Assembly of the clay sculpture commissioned by the city of Sarcelles for the music school. The sculpture is assembled solid, worked as a block like stone. Then it is empty-shaped to be fired in the kiln at 1340°C.



Mariko working on "Les Musiciens"

LES CARIATIDES

Commission for a sculpture for the decoration to adorn the stage of a theatre.



Mariko working on "Les Cariatides"

formation

1978	Lycée Nevers, Montpellier - Baccalauréat A4 (Mathematics and Philosophy)
1982-1987	Beaux-Arts, Montpellier - Modelling and Sculpture (Form and Volume)
1987	École Boulle, Paris - Modelling and Sculpture (Form and Volume)
1988-1989	Fonderie, Maussane-les-Alpilles - Bronze Casting and Molding using the Lost-Wax Technique
2001-2002	Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier - D.U. (Ancient Architecture and Restoration Techniques)

artistic journey

2001-2002	Elected Cultural Delegate, Lamalou-les-Bains - Founded a municipal art gallery.
2002	Relocated to Southern Corsica, Ajaccio - Opened her studio and founded the art school ARTU DI A TARRA.
2003	Exhibitions at Fashion Café Gallery, Ajaccio.
2004	Solo exhibitions at the Palais des Congrès, Ajaccio.
2006	Exhibitions at Arkane Gallery, Ajaccio.
2007	Exhibition at the Grand Palais, Paris (November 4-8) - Société des Artistes Français.
2008	Exhibition at Sofitel, Porticcio. Public commission from the City of Sarcelles - Monumental work for the School of Music. Joined Galerie Médicis, Place des Vosges, Paris, as a sculptor.
2009	Joined Galerie de la Méditerranée, Saint-Paul de Vence, as a sculptor.
2010	Exhibition at Frank Picon Gallery, Paris.
2011	Permanent exhibition at Espaces 77, Montmartre, Paris. Participation in Art Basel / Art Context, Miami, Florida.
2012	Joined Gauchet Fine Art Gallery, Miami, Florida, as a sculptor.
2013	Exhibition at Art Basel, SKYDECK Rooftop, Miami Beach (Sony Building).
2014	Commission of three monumental resin sculptures for the Ringier Group, Zurich, Switzerland.
2015	Preparation of the Samurai Rhinoceros bronze series in foundry for an exhibition in New York (FirstDeam Building).
2016	Commission of a monumental resin sculpture, The Mustang (3 m high × 4.95 m long), installed at the entrance of Montpellier.
2017	Commission of monumental ceramic sculptures (giraffes and figures) for park landscaping.
2018	Commission of a bronze war memorial for Chialza, Southern Corsica.
2019	Commission of Arion, a resin horse sculpture by CFC Développement, Avenue Nina Simone, Montpellier.

Dalí Universe and Lart Universe

To preserve, promote, enhance, and disseminate art on an international level.



Beniamino Levi, gallerist, collector, and promoter of international art

Beniamino Levi, born in 1928, is one of the most iconic and long-standing figures in the world of modern and contemporary art. A renowned gallerist, collector and patron, his career spans over 70 years in the international art market, during which he built personal and professional relationships with some of the greatest artists of the twentieth century.

His passion for art emerged early: raised in an environment sensitive to the arts his grandfather was an antique dealer in Sanremo in the nineteenth century Levi developed from a young age a strong interest in artistic culture and the history of human creativity.

The Levi Gallery in Milan

At the age of 28, in 1956, Beniamino Levi opened his first art gallery in Milan, on Via Montenapoleone, with the aim of introducing international modern art into the heart of Italian culture.

The transition from bridge to art was not accidental: while playing bridge, he met the art critic Franco Passoni, who recognized in Levi a deep artistic sensitivity and encouraged him to open a gallery in the space in front of his wife's family jewellery shop.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Levi Gallery became a key reference point for collectors, intellectuals, and art lovers. Here Levi presented international artists alongside Italian avant-garde movements, bringing to Italy works by masters such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, René Magritte, Wassily Kandinsky, Lucio Fontana, Giorgio de Chirico, and many others. Members of high society, including Maria Callas, the industrialist Baron Thyssen, and the Agnelli family, frequented the gallery, attracted by the quality and rarity of its exhibitions.

The encounter and deep bond with Salvador Dalí

In the 1960s, Beniamino Levi organized an exhibition dedicated to Surrealism at his Milan gallery. It was on that occasion that he met Salvador Dalí, one of the most brilliant and controversial artists of the twentieth century, and a deep relationship was born between them that would last for decades. The relationship between Levi and Dalí was not only professional but also personal and creative: Levi became one of the main supporters of the Master's three-dimensional art, encouraging Dalí to develop and resume his sculptural activity on a large scale.



Gala (Dalí's wife), Salvador Dalí Beniamino Levi

It is widely acknowledged that one of the reasons Salvador Dalí devoted himself more intensively to bronze sculpture was precisely the influence and encouragement of Beniamino Levi, who inspired him to create three-dimensional works based on the most iconic images of his surrealist painting.

Levi was not only in contact with Dalí, but also maintained close relationships with Gala Dalí, Dalí's wife and companion, who often managed relations with gallerists and the cultural milieu, as well as with Enrique Sabater, the Master's long-time secretary and collaborator, with whom he sustained a deep professional relationship over the years of their collaboration.

Levi's contribution to the revival of bronze sculpture within Dalí's production was decisive: thanks to his involvement and commissions, Dalí created a series of memorable bronze sculptures that have become some of the most renowned three-dimensional works of the Master worldwide.

Among these, we may recall just a few works of great symbolic and iconographic impact, such as The Persistence of Memory, the supernatural sculpture Snail and the Angel, Space Venus, and finally the powerful Saint George and the Dragon, a bronze sculpture that reinterprets the classical myth through a surrealist aesthetic.

The sculpture Saint George and the Dragon, created under Levi's curator-ship, holds particular significance: a version of this work was donated to Pope John Paul II by the Dalí Universe collection and is now exhibited in the Vatican Museums as a testimony to the dialogue between art, faith, and cultural memory.



Beniamino Levi and Pope Giovanni Paolo II, 1995



DALÍ UNIVERSE
AND INTERNATIONAL ART PROJECTS

In the 1990s, and with increasing momentum from the 2000s onward, Beniamino Levi founded Dalí Universe, a cultural and collecting platform entirely dedicated to the work of Salvador Dalí.

Dalí Universe was created with the aim of preserving, enhancing, and disseminating the artistic legacy of the Catalan Master, with particular attention to his three-dimensional production.

Today, the collection represents one of the largest and most significant in the world of Dalí's sculptural works and includes bronze sculptures, art objects, glass pieces, surrealist furniture, signed graphics, and gouaches.

Part of this extraordinary heritage is permanently exhibited at Dalí Paris, in the Montmartre district of Paris, a museum entirely dedicated to the three-dimensional dimension of Dalí's work.

Alongside the Paris location, Dalí Universe also includes another important permanent museum in Bruges, likewise dedicated to Salvador Dalí, which represents one of the most significant European hubs for the dissemination of the Master's sculptural work.

Beyond its permanent venues, Dalí Universe, under the curatorship of Beniamino Levi, has developed more than one hundred major international exhibitions.

Through permanent museums, temporary exhibitions, and large-scale international projects, Dalí Universe stands as a global cultural system, capable of consolidating and renewing the presence of Salvador Dalí within the international art scene, keeping his legacy alive and making it accessible to ever wider audiences.

Collections, galleries, and museums worldwide

The work of Beniamino Levi extends far beyond the mere management of collections: he has created an international network of galleries and museums that combine exhibition, dialogue, and the dissemination of art.

On an international level, there are both permanent and temporary spaces dedicated to Salvador Dalí as well as to other modern and contemporary artists, under the umbrella of Dalí Universe and Lart Universe.

Significant projects include galleries and museums where oil paintings on canvas, bronzes, drawings, and objects from the surrealist repertoire are exhibited alongside temporary exhibitions that engage with art, culture, and interdisciplinary thought.

Beyond celebrating Dalí's work, these institutions position themselves as vibrant cultural hubs: they host conferences, artist talks, educational programs, events, and other initiatives aimed at bringing art closer to the public in an accessible and engaging way.

An ambassador of global art

Beniamino Levi is universally recognized not only as a highly experienced gallerist and collector, but also as a passionate promoter of modern and contemporary art.

With hundreds of exhibitions curated worldwide, one of the most important collections of Salvador Dalí, and a career that has spanned the major artistic movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Levi represents an emblematic figure in the world of visual culture.

His work continues to inspire, promote, and disseminate art globally, contributing to moving beyond mere aesthetic appreciation and transforming it into a cultural and human experience.

LART UNIVERSE

THE LART UNIVERSE PROJECT: "ART TO BE LIVED"

Within the cultural vision of Beniamino Levi, Lart Universe takes shape, a project conceived, created, and developed by Marco Franchi, who has worked alongside Levi for years in the growth and management of Dalí Universe.

Founded in 2023, Lart Universe is an international project conceived as a network of distributed cultural hubs: galleries, museums, and exhibition spaces designed not only as places of contemplation, but as true environments of experience.

Its guiding motto is "Art to be lived." A slogan that fully reflects Marco Franchi's vision, supported by the experience and historical memory of Beniamino Levi, a key reference figure and mentor of the project. The aim is to make art accessible, immersive, and part of everyday life: an art that can be experienced in all its dimensions.

Alongside exhibitions, meetings with artists, conferences, moments of dialogue, cultural events, and themed evenings are organized, with the intention of transforming each space into a living, participatory environment open to the public. Not simply galleries or museums, but centers of human and intellectual exchange, where art becomes a shared experience.

The Lart Universe project also takes shape through the opening of numerous international flagship galleries, created by Marco Franchi under the Lart Universe name.

These spaces represent the operational core of the project: places where exhibitions, presentations of modern and contemporary artists, cultural events, and educational initiatives coexist. Each gallery is conceived as an active cultural outpost, capable of engaging with its local territory while simultaneously connecting with an international network of collectors, scholars, and enthusiasts.

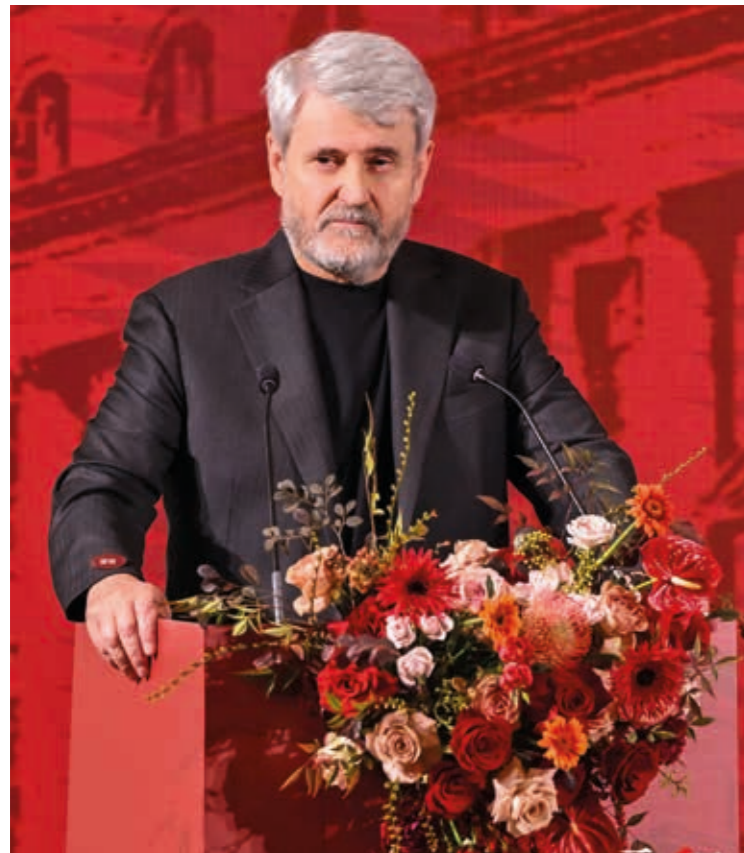
Lart Universe thus emerges from the meeting between the contemporary vision of Marco Franchi and the cultural legacy of Beniamino Levi, who accompanies this ambitious project as a guide, a historical memory of art, and a human and intellectual reference point.

A continuous dialogue between present and history, between creative impulse and consolidated knowledge, shaping a constantly evolving cultural platform.

An ambitious project, conceived and realized by Marco Franchi, that looks toward the future of art as an open, shared, and living space: an international ecosystem in which the artistic experience becomes an integral part of everyday life, capable of creating authentic connections, crossing generations, and bringing different cultures into dialogue.



Beniamino Levi, Marco Franchi



Marco Franchi, Salvador Dalí "Comienzo" Exhibition, Shanghai



Nicolas Decharnes, Marco Franchi

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