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Francisco Toledo: Fire and Earth

November 23, 2019 – January 18, 2020
Opening Reception: November, 23 5-8PM

Latin American Masters presents *Fire and Earth*, a solo exhibition of Francisco Toledo's ceramics. Best known as a painter and printmaker, Toledo's artistic production from the beginning had extremely broad dimensions. Toledo, who died in 2019, was a gifted sculptor and ceramicist, whose works in these mediums can be compared favorably with the finest in the Western tradition.

The exhibition includes thirty-one ceramics from the estate of the artist. Among the highlights are two sculptures of dogs, each seated upright and surrounded by bones. Toledo's dogs evoke Mexico's rich zoomorphic culture, in particular, the dog effigies of Colima and Veracruz. Here, Toledo transforms ancient iconography into contemporary works that address the consequences of violence and over-consumption.

There are wonderful examples of Toledo's self-portraits in the exhibition. *Pupa*, 2015, features Toledo, replete with antennae, emerging from a cocoon. *Slave Ship*, 2015, depicts Toledo manacled and chained to a ship stacked with human cargo. Recently, Toledo discovered that his genealogy was both indigenous Zapotec and African, a fact that both pleased and encouraged him to further explore the hidden history of Africans in Mexico.

Toledo was a lifelong activist. In 2014, when forty-three students disappeared in Guerrero, Mexico, Toledo felt compelled to make the ceramics exhibition, *Duelo (Mourning)*, at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City. *Fire and Earth* includes selected works from Toledo's acclaimed MAM exhibition, including: *Death Grabs a Man*, 2015, a masterful example of expressionism in three-dimensional form. Also important are two life-size church bells: one decorated with gold, the other covered in snakes. Both bells resonate with an uncanny silence, as if artifacts of lost communal voice.

Toledo's bestiary is well represented throughout the exhibition, including: toads, bats, elephants, birds, and various denizens of the insect world. Whether mining history and culture for new meanings, or discovering new and surprising aesthetic conjunctions, Francisco Toledo's ceramics remain fully engaged with his elemental materials: fire and earth.

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