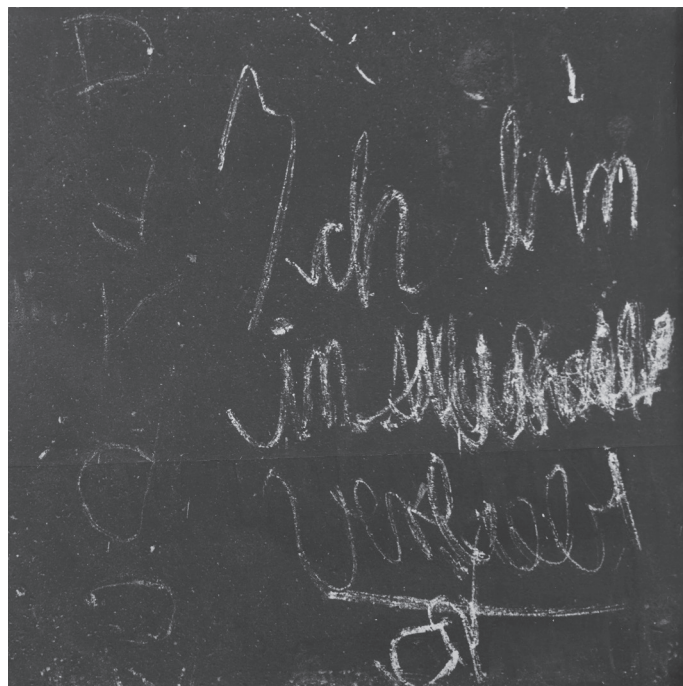
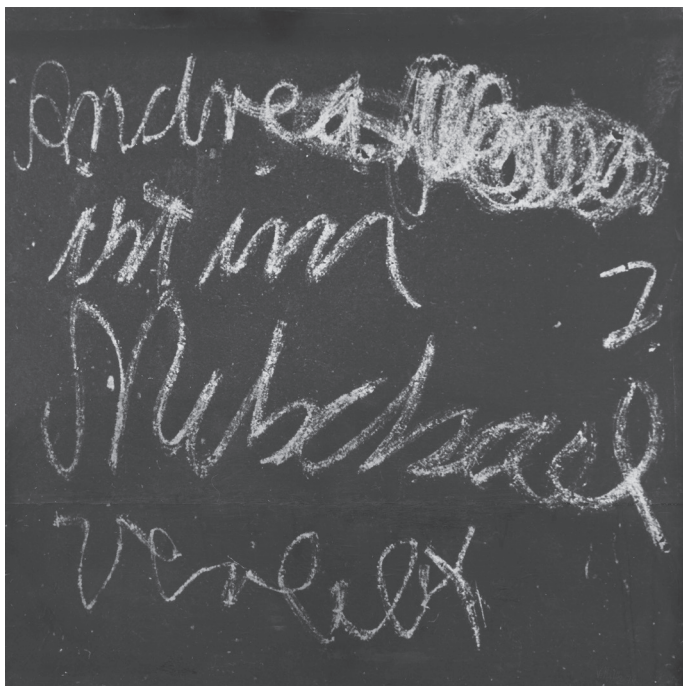


# DARÍO VILLALBA. RESPLANDOR SECO

24.11.2016 – 11.03.2017



AMOR KRANKENHAUS/DUREN I-II, 1976. © Darío Villalba, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2016

One of the main activities of the Fundació Suñol is to analyse and revise its own collection, with the idea of more carefully reviewing the careers of artists whose work it features. On this occasion the foundation presents *Resplandor seco* [Dry Resplendence], an exhibition featuring more than thirty works by Darío Villalba. An artist who has consolidated his career over a period of some 60 years, Villalba has made a place for himself in the history of recent art, being one of the pioneers in Spain in introducing photography in the pictorial support.

Darío Villalba (1939) exhibited several times at the Galeria Vandrés in Madrid between 1972 and 1978, and it was in that context that he met Josep Suñol. Suñol supported him and purchased a considerable number of his works, which now belong to the Josep Suñol Collection. These same pieces now feature in the exhibition *Resplandor seco*, along with a selection from the holdings of the artist himself, rounding off an exhaustive venture through the artist's creative production.

His career has been characterised by his will to go beyond styles and tendencies: Villalba is neither an informalist nor an expressionist, a figurative or abstract artist, nor does he do pop art or social realism. Villalba is a painter who is customarily defined as one of the precursors of the merging of photography and contemporary painting, allowing him to bring together two fleeting moments: the

mechanical gesture of photographic technique and the intentional trace of the painter's hand.

The 1960's and the 1970's were decades typified by the popularisation of the image on paper, the proliferation of photography in the advertising image, press reports accompanied by images and cameras for personal use. Together they would inhabit the iconicity of the daily life of cities. It was in that context that, in a moment of uncontrolled explosiveness, Villalba put a halt to the mere movement of images so as to fit them into painting, where they would work as if a crack or rupture. In these early works, photographs done by the artist himself as an amateur and others taken from the mass media became fragments of reality that had to interrupt their flow as images so as to take on a potential second life. Cut out not only from their distributive flux but also from their context, they are human figures that have been amputated

from larger, more complete images, with the goal of “giving them maximum transcendence, even in a religious sense”, as Villalba himself has explained.

His aesthetic criteria represented a tense and on-going dialogue with the international avant-garde, which would bring him to feel like an exile in his country of birth. His interest was to offer a response to American pop art, which he had seen come to life close at hand while studying at Harvard University, early in the decade of the 1960s. This stage in the United States would lead to a series of exhibitions in that country, allowing him to gain recognition for the series *La Duquesa de Alba* [The Duchess of Alba] and *Fósiles, torsos y huellas* [Fossils, Torsos and Imprints]. Later, in 1967, he began a period of travels to London which supplied him with a fine source of photographic images of urban environments.

Andy Warhol’s definition of the work of Villalba as *pop soul* explains how the artist has centred his intention. He is more attracted to the marginal inhabitants of New York, both psychologically and biologically oversized, than consumer society itself. It was from his stay in the United States that Villalba began to perceive the possibility of making an anti-pop art, as he would end up writing in his diary: “Glass skin acclimatizes man made of skin and bones”; or “Organ and psyche feed off of plastics and aluminium. Coexistence.” These notes, written in 1964, are the entrance point for what was later transformed into the series *Los encapsulados* [The Encapsulated], which began that very year and would continue well into the 1970s. The series was internationally acclaimed, leading to the exhibition he would do at the XII Sao Paulo Biennial, where he won the International Painting Prize. The year he participated in the Biennial, 1973, would take on great importance in his work, as it would lead to consolidating his international reputation.

In the exhibition *Resplandor seco* we find the work *Jones* (1974), an example of one of these encapsulated pieces, which could be defined as sculptures made up of large, hanging Plexiglas capsules, each with the silhouette of a two-dimensional human image inside. The beings depicted are in agony or in dramatic poses, imbued

nonetheless with a disturbing, troubling coolness.

The ambiguous motifs that distinguish the work of Darío Villalba are in direct relation to the artistic language he uses. Focusing on the human figure, he is interested in bodies that are set apart from propagandistic social representation: the destitute and the ill, male hustlers, the elderly, children – all people on the limit, contrasting with everyday archetypes. Villalba proffers on them an almost heraldic presence, intense in its solitude, its beauty highly expressive.

During the 1990s, the iconographic presences in Villalba’s work began to uninhibitedly point to the creation of a corpus. From the portraits turning into emblems to his aquatic scenes, up to his skins and picto-photographic abstractions of earths and demolitions, his work begins to take on a literal shape. Like an anatomy transposed over top of the city, the earths are related to skins, the sewers with wounds, hospital beds with the bodies of the ill, scars with future injuries; even abstractions are “intensely experienced”, as he himself explains. An art that returns to the body.

This exhibition brings together a careful selection of work clearly illuminating Villalba’s career, from the beginnings, when experimentation with photography and painting was more latent and experimental, to his more current production, which quite frequently recomposes and revitalizes images of the past. We also find what are called the “basic documents”, a type of “cabinet of curiosities” making it possible to examine the sources of photographic inspiration the artist has employed.

On the occasion of this exhibition a catalogue has been published featuring a text by Arturo Sagastibelza, *Humility*, and another by Manuel Segade, entitled *Breaches*. This exhibition is an extraordinary opportunity to see and experience Villalba’s work, in what it is the first time a solo show by Darío Villalba has been seen in Barcelona.



## Fundació Suñol

Passeig de Gràcia 98 - 08008 Barcelona  
T 93 496 10 32  
info@fundaciosunol.org  
www.fundaciosunol.org

### Opening hours.

Monday to Friday, 11 am to 2 pm and 4 pm to 8 pm. Saturday, 4 pm to 8 pm. Closed Sundays and Public Holidays.

### Guided visits.

**Groups:** telephone or email for an appointment.