

ART AND CULTURE

# Rivelino

Mexican Sculptor  
Of His Time

Rommel Scorza Gaxiola\*





Juan Lamata

"Our Silences," January-February 2011, London.

The sculptor Rivelino was born in 1973 in the state of Jalisco. This state has also given us other prominent exponents of Mexico's visual arts and letters, like painters Dr. Atl, José Clemente Orozco, and Juan Soriano, and writers Juan Rulfo and Juan José Arreola. It is also the cradle of certain expressions of national identity like tequila and mariachis. Like some of his fellow Jalisco natives, from a very young age, Rivelino has sought to communicate much more than that; he has tried to innovate without renouncing the place that gave him his first childhood visual and aural impressions.

When he was about 10, he moved to Mexico City, and from there reaffirmed his liking and knowledge of the pre-Colombian past and the cultures of Mesoamerica, which left an important mark on universal art. Through pre-Hispanic architecture and from what we can see of some extant art forms like the textiles, ceramics, and sculpture, particularly on a grand scale, these cultures found an excellent medium to transmit very direct messages to the very depths of their people. It is difficult to explain the exact meaning of these objects and the ideas they attempted to communicate, which is why

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we can say they are enigmatic. This is where Rivelino draws nourishment for his work.

From the capital city, he was able to observe the work by the artists in vogue at the time, particularly those from Oaxaca; given his links to artists from that region of the country, part of his work conveys the ochre colors and earth tones and textures. At the same time, in the early 1990s, he practiced in different laboratories and workshops, working in wood, clay, marble, restoring, and even metal. Around 1998, he entered the National Fine Arts Institute Ceramics School. So, both in a formal setting and as a self-taught artist, Rivelino has assimilated different traditional and contemporary artistic techniques to consolidate his own style; clay and metal are the materials with which he has expressed himself with the greatest plasticity and forcefulness.

The sculptor himself compares his work to the experiences that mark a person in life. For example, tracing a figure on



"Our Silences," October 2011, Mexico City's Zócalo Square. Monumental sculpture installation that includes 10 three-dimensional, large-format sculptures (3.50 x 2.30 x 1.10 m), each weighing approximately one ton (cast bronze with a patina of white and ochre).

a piece of clay or a metal plaque, whether pressing heavily, attacking the material, or delicately, protecting it, leaves a mark on those objects, a groove or a protuberance, just like the injuries and blows that life deals you. "We are full of hundreds of fragments inside us that leave marks that we usually forget about and that I try to reveal and make visible in a work, so that we remember what we're made up of, of thousands of experiences," he says.

Rivelino's art displays a purified technique characterized by the combination of different materials like cotton, ceramics, steel, bronze, and resins, among others. His pieces are noteworthy for their different recurring ornamental figures; for example, an enigmatic human face in bronze with a plaque covering its mouth; the *haut-* and *bas-reliefs*; small sculptures of chrysalises, butterflies, tortoise shells, hearts, seeds, arrows, and the indecipherable free-style calligraphy, all aesthetic elements that have become the stamp of his work.

With over a 15-year career, Rivelino has managed to integrate ample experimentation with materials and an ongoing aesthetic and emotional analysis of his work, as well as a personal relationship with his urban surroundings. He has based his work on the strength transmitted by the materials themselves, through which he interprets ideas, sensations, and themes of daily life like writing, time, human relationships, freedom, and silence, and he even utilizes segments of the

# RIVELINO



Arturo González de Alba



*Inside Of, I*, 27 x 26 x 26 cm, 2010 (bronze).



*Inside Of, II*, 33 x 22 x 22 cm, 2010 (bronze).

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*Inside Of, VI*, 60 x 26 x 26 cm, 2011 (carbon steel).

Photos on this page are by Arturo González de Alba.



*Natural Dialogues*, 320 x 600 cm, 2010 (bronze and carbon steel).

past and of history. For this reason, links to architecture, archaeology, history, sociology, and psychology can be observed in his works.

In the last three years, Rivelino has successfully entered the spheres of monumental sculptural installation and public intervention, through which he has investigated the relationship between the viewer and the work itself. This is the case of “Our Silences” and “Roots,” recent presentations that I will touch on later. To date, he has participated in 60 collective and 35 individual shows in Mexico and abroad, and his work is part of the most important private collections in Mexico, Germany, Spain, France, Japan, Australia, Canada, the United States, and Central and South America.

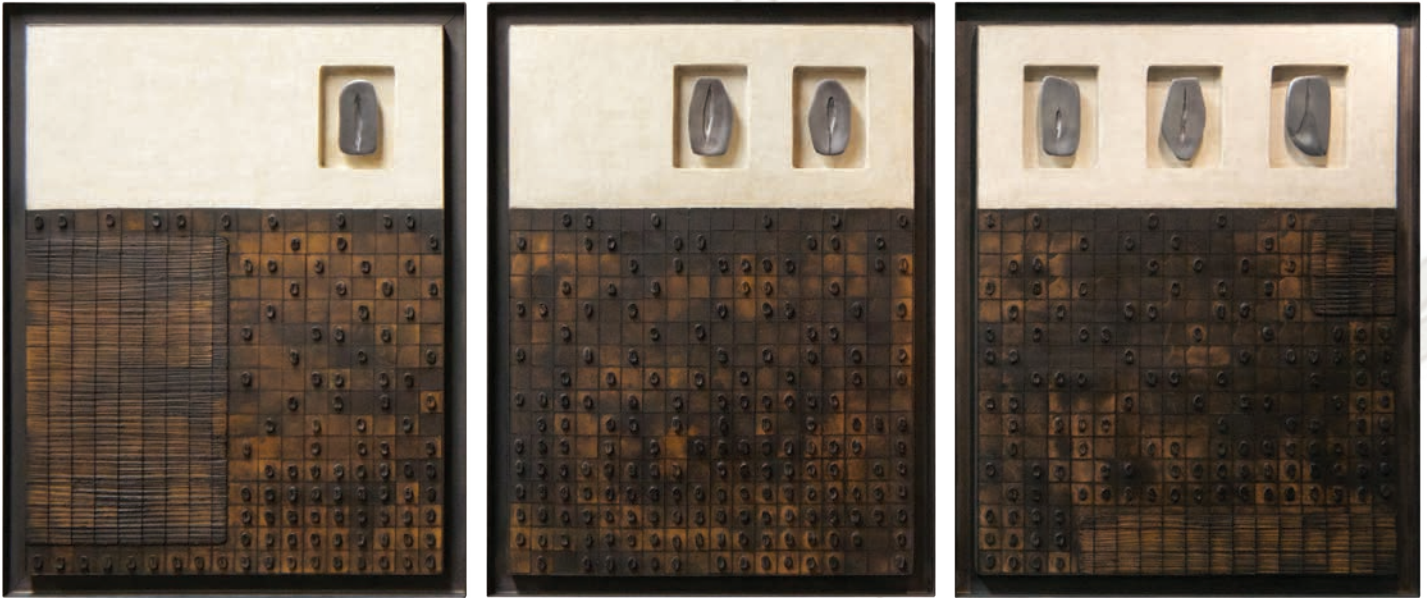
For Rivelino, being an artist anywhere in the world is a complicated matter, but being one in your country of origin is three times more difficult. He considers it a heroic act, above all because you seem to have to prove too much. Although in his case, he is not pursuing that particular objective: his interest is in testing himself. Most of the time, he tries to listen to his inner voice and concentrate on his projects and what daily existence brings him, adapting and reformulating his creativity.

For this reason, Rivelino considers his work space more a laboratory than a sculpture workshop or an artist’s atelier. A large part of his works are the result of constant experimentation; for example, when he sticks two materials together

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with glue or resin; when he gets a certain texture in the clay; when he does an oxidation treatment on metals to accelerate the visual effect of time; when in the finishing process, whether opaque or shiny, trying to get a mirror effect; or when he tries to find a way to get a single piece to hold 100, 200, or 300 kilos. In short, Rivelino follows no instruction manuals. Usually, he goes by trial and error, and he stops the moment he gets, perhaps not the desired effect, but something he likes.

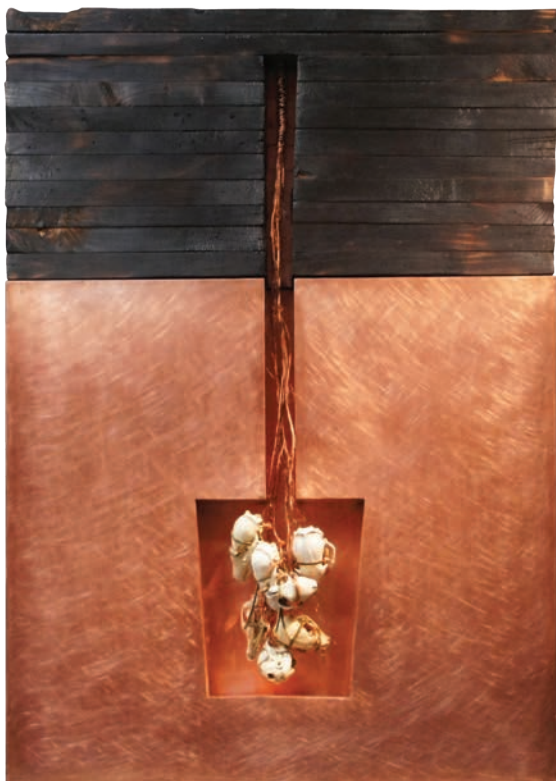
As a contemporary artist, he has managed to project Mexican art internationally, transforming a certain rather traditional image into a renewed, well-executed, open image, open in a global, more interconnected world, in which, paradoxically, it is more difficult to communicate. Testimony to this is “Our Silences,” the most recent itinerant exhibit of monumental Mexican sculpture, conceived for display in eight European cities. From 2009, and after a two-year sojourn through important plazas, gardens, and main boulevards in Lisbon, Madrid, Brussels, Potsdam, Rome, London, Moscow, and Saint Petersburg, “Our Silences” arrived in Mexico City



Three Summaries, 130 x 100 cm, 2011 (fired ceramics, cotton, and carbon steel).

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Playing with Fire, 125 x 90 x 10 cm, 2011 (copper, wood, and bone).

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in October 2011. It brought with it the echo of all the success accumulated along the way, to be exhibited with great fanfare and to transmit its potent social message of free expression in the heart of the country, the capital's main Zócalo square, the most emblematic place of the nation's history and the world's second-largest public plaza, undoubtedly an epicenter of the expression of Mexico's diversity of voices.

"Our Silences" is made up of 10 monumental anthropomorphic sculptures, in white and ochre cast bronze (3.5m x 2.3m x 1.2m, weighing one ton each). The busts have both *haut-* and *bas-reliefs*, seeds, plants, traces of free interpretation, and the plaque covering their mouths, representing the importance of freedom of individual and collective expression. An eleventh sculpture, a two-cubic-meter steel "tactile box," holds four small-scale sculptures reproducing the life-sized ones.

In May 2011, after three years of absence from Mexico's exposition scene, Rivelino presented the show *Nomad Essence* at the Querétaro Art Museum (MaQro), in the Old Saint Agustín Monastery. The exhibition brought together 20 works that melded Rivelino's experience based on the many moves he has made as part of his artistic activity in the more than one dozen cities he alternated living in over two years while he worked on preparing and mounting "Our Silences." In his opinion, it was an honest exercise of emotional and intellectual self-reflection about his artistic career and work. In short, it was a reinterpretation of his own work to revisit certain themes and reformulate them in new pieces.

What can be observed, as a result, is a purification of certain elements, the refinement of the finishing touches, and the consolidation of colors. One example is the series of bronze “ossuaries.” The cube form appears most frequently, as in the work “Inside Of,” made of engraved carbon steel, in addition to the Querétaro show’s title work, “Nomad Essence,” a 100-piece polyptych that summarizes this “deterritorialized” way of living and working, which undoubtedly influences artistic creation.

In November 2011, Rivelino inaugurated the Ministry of the Economy’s art gallery with the exhibit “Limits and Consequences,” a series of 30 works that also summarizes the itinerant experience and the implications of making exhausting efforts and living on the edge. Outstanding among them

spaces and facades of different buildings of symbolic, patrimonial value, concentrated mainly in Mexico City’s historic downtown area.

The installation is a novel, original visual image, a gigantic, 1.2-kilometer rhizomorphic sculpture, intermittently connected by large stalks, extending in waves like a tree through important plazas, branching invisibly or in an imaginary way

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The National Art Museum in the Historic Center.

“Roots,” 2012, Mexico City.



The Palace of Fine Arts.

because of its chromatic and aesthetic impact and its size is *Natural Dialogues*, an intense red triptych of 24 anonymous faces, first displayed in the World Expo 2010 Shanghai.

For the last few years of hard creative work and cultural promotion, Rivelino has had the great opportunity of looking inward and to the past, the personal, and that of his country, as well as deepening his exploration of social issues and analyzing the world scene of large-scale urban public intervention. This period translated into the preparation for his most ambitious project in recent years, “Roots,” a huge, unprecedented installation of public art unlike any other ever presented before in Mexico. It is made up of a multiple, simultaneous public intervention that takes 24 hours to mount in 13 external

underground, to break through the surface in historic buildings of different eras and styles that have been architectural, emblematic icons of our development as a nation, sources of identity and depositories of cultural and artistic expression.

“Roots” is an homage to the city’s architecture and art venues, a call to rediscover history, safeguard our patrimony, and strengthen society through culture. It is also an important collaboration between the Mexico City government, its Ministry of Culture, the National Council for Culture and the Arts, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the Rivelino studio, and private business. For more about his work, see [www.rivelino.com.mx](http://www.rivelino.com.mx) and [www.nuestrossilencios.com.mx](http://www.nuestrossilencios.com.mx). **VM**