



Drawing parallelism between the opening of his new exhibition at Peres Projects Berlin titled *The Garden Dies with the Gardener* with his wedding day, Anton Munar shares many reflections and vital experiences in the conversation you can read below. A talk that starts from this exciting new project, which you can visit until September 2, and which came out of a very strong sentiment as its author explains to us, and leads us through many other topics ranging from the meaning of the mountains have for him, his trips between Denmark and Spain, Goya's *Black Paintings* and his grandmother, Mariñesi. Keep reading!

**Anton, you're presenting *The Garden Dies with the Gardener*, your debut solo exhibition with Peres Projects and your first show in Berlin. How do you feel?**

I guess I would have to say I end up with mixed feelings in the best way possible because, somehow, it's a goodbye for me to works that have been by my side for many, many years. For me, it's a real-life experience. I was always telling my grandmother about how I felt like this was my 'art wedding,' which is a weird thing.

I got married last year, and I somehow felt a very similar energy on the day up to the show's inauguration, something about inviting friends and family to this celebration. The hard thing here is that you're the only one at the wedding, so there's no one you can look at and rest in the knowledge that they are exactly in the same place as you. I was just very moved to be able to show the work in an energy and a type of space.

With everyone at Peres Projects and some dear friends, we sort of managed to create a space so that it would have the intimacy I've always strived for in my work and so it can be experienced at one's inner rhythm – even

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though you have these big majestic gallery spaces nowadays.

I was just speaking to a friend about Alfred Stieglitz's Gallery 291 in New York in the early 1900s, and how it was organised in very small rooms showing the works of Picasso, Matisse, and the Cubists that they were bringing to the United States. There was a kind of intimacy in those space, which was more like a little chapel in the mayhem of a big city, and I think there's something very beautiful if you can create intimacy for the experience of watching and being in the presence of paintings.



**It isn't easy to put on a solo show, and as you've said, some paintings have been with you for many years. How long have you been working on this project? What can you tell us about your creative process?**

I've been working on this exhibition for quite a while, but that'd be lying. In a way, I'm always trying to work or, ideally, I'm always working, but not in a 9-to-5 way. I remember Alex Katz saying in a talk that you just need 'to touch it once a day.' That's work. So he can just be doing a little drawing or painting or just thinking and scribbling.

In the last four years, my painting practice has very much turned into a sort of meditation. When it goes well, then it's a space where I can just be present and fool around or be very serious if that's how I'm feeling, while sometimes I'm there in a state of complete serenity. The thing is, I realised at some point that what I wanted out of having a practice was to be in a space where I could be all the sides of me.

So the process of creating this exhibition comes out of that, but also, I haven't made any of these works specifically thinking about the exhibition. I just try to make work when I want to and how I want to. And then from there, there's a desire that grows which has to do with showing it, and then there's a desire that comes up to create conversations between pieces, but that is all after the fact. So that's why I don't want to create one complete body of work that I would then do a show with, or at least I've not yet had that desire as for now. I love to be able to show a work from four years back with one made yesterday, and this is what I feel gives me the most freedom. But then, the creating of an exhibition where you kind of get to play around retrospectively with the poems you've written, it's more like assembling the book of poems rather than the show being one poem. Or maybe I'm just tripping now.

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**The exhibition, which we can visit until September 2, is especially important to you. “In other words, the art dies with the artist. If it somehow were to be the only show I would get to do in this life it would be enough, or at least that’s how I’m feeling right now,” you shared on your social media a few days ago. Tell us about the meaning behind it, please.**

That came out of a very strong sentiment. I was feeling very, very strongly in the months up to [the exhibition], and I still feel very strongly. It’s this thought of: we are alive right now. Many of my favourite artists are alive too. However, many of my other favourite artists, musicians, poets, and writers are dead, so how do I relate to this? How do I relate to being a person that spends his time doing things? These are things that I can’t necessarily explain. At the same time, I feel such a strong connection and closeness with them and the works of others.

When we finished installing the exhibition, I started to feel the harmonies of how it had come together, and the space and these more architectural ideas I had had about how to have a rhythm between the space and its light. When it all came together, I felt like if that was it, that would be good enough – also because so many of my favourite artists have never gotten the chance to show in a space like this. So there’s a real feeling of being very grateful and lucky to be granted the chance to exhibit in such a beautiful location, and also to be given the freedom to do with it what I wanted to.

It’s one thing to be given the space, but then to get to do exactly what you want is one of the greatest gestures of love. Everyone at Peres Projects stood by my decisions and helped immensely to pursue my desires for the works. And for that, I will always be very thankful.



**Did you ever dream of your artwork being exhibited in Berlin, in a prestigious gallery, for more than two months?**

I will only answer the first part of the question. To be honest, no, because you can’t foresee where life will take you; in the same way, you don’t know what kind of friends you will make along the way. To show my work in Berlin and in this context is not something I ever thought of, because even though I always wanted to, I could’ve never visualised a way of what that would be like. I couldn’t know what the future would hold. In a way, I kept doing it constantly because of how it makes me be in the world and how much I love the work of others, which inspires me endlessly.



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## **I've read that the mountain is a very important element in your work and life, isn't it? Why?**

My goodness, the mountain is one of the best teachers of life, but I'm more of an onlooker than a hiker. It's more about the experience of looking at the mountains from a distance and what desire that instills in me. Also, there's a kind of weight to a mountain. The ones I mostly paint break the horizon line.

The mountains in my paintings aren't yet those from the Tramontana, which is the mountain range in Mallorca that I see when I do yoga. They're more like an extension of me. At the same time, they're something I know I will never be able to grasp, so they're a container of many abstract thoughts and desires. And it's something that always changes with the light. It's a presence. It's a sculpture.

Also, looking at the mountains of Mallorca in some ways has taught me to paint with a different type of space and weight because early on, the space in my works was much more flat. But after adding the mountain as a subject, there was this kind of lyrical symbol in the distance. So I think it was very crucial for my development as a painter, and it's something I know I will paint till I die. It's really a lifelong friendship and I love to think of all the people who've lived in past times and felt the same way. I think that if you ask most people that have grown up near a mountain, there will often be some sort of very magical and personal relationship.



## **You were born in Copenhagen but the landscapes in your paintings are led by imaginative interpretations of your own childhood garden in Mallorca. Can you tell us more about your origins, your childhood and adolescence?**

As I was saying before, I think the subjects of the paintings and how they come to be is very much a day-to-day thing. For the last six years, through painting mostly in Copenhagen but also coming to Mallorca at least once a year and really painting a lot here too, I think there was an aspect of wanting to get closer to something.

I have been missing Mallorca and living here in how it makes my body feel, and how I feel when the sun hits my skin, the kinds of shadows that come through here, the trees, the plants. Being close to the sea makes me feel so much better, and I think painting is also a good tool to be in all those kinds of emotions.

The thing is, I was born in Copenhagen, but when I was 2 years old we moved to Mallorca and then I was brought up here for seven years till I was 9. So my formative early childhood was very much here and I

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remember that was a very imaginative time in my life. I was just playing a lot with my brother and my cousins in the mountains. And in the summer, we would play by the sea and were always creating these mysteries and drama and acting out. It was a really beautiful childhood in that sense; it's something that shaped me.

My practice is just because it's shaped me as a person. But I think it's hard to overanalyse where you're from and why it affects your work in such or such way, because for me to paint is also a way of living and I wouldn't want to live without it, so to analyse myself would be like being my own therapist.

## **Your Spanish grandmother was the one in your family with art books in her living room, wasn't she? What influence has she had in your way of seeing and interpreting painting?**

My grandmother Mariñesi is also my godmother; we have a very special relationship. She's one of the people I hold dearest to my heart. She's been very formative in my thinking and my ways of looking at the world. I also love how she is around family, her inquisitive way of looking at the world; she's like a poet or a historian. Just fantastic to be around. And she always made me feel seen.

It's hard to talk about her like that because there's just so much I would like to say. I don't think I would be a painter if it wasn't for her, but also my mother and my father – just my family in general has been very informative. But my grandmother has stood at the helm. She had these beautiful art books lying about, and as soon as I got the slightest interest in painting she would show them to me, which fed a very loving way of looking at art (looking at artworks through your love for them).

To me, that's one of the best ways to look at art. If you see an artwork that hits you emotionally, allow yourself to be taken by it and consumed by what it creates within you, to have that relationship. Then, hopefully, you will be able to share that relationship with someone you care about. I think that, with my grandmother, I always felt a closeness in our relationship where I could be very connected to these emotions.

## **She travelled to Berlin to attend the opening, right?**

Yes, my whole family pretty much came through. I get really moved just thinking about it. In a way, it's weird because no one would come abroad if I were a carpenter, but there's this thing with art where the openings are such a celebration. A moment of coming together, with both strangers and the ones you love. So to have them near me and for them to be able to come meant everything. I will always have that with me.

## **Who were your greatest references when you took your first steps in art?**

It's hard to say. I could go two different ways, but I'm sticking to the beginning. Normally, every time we would do a family trip, it would be from Denmark to Spain and from Spain to Denmark to visit our relatives. But when my siblings and I had our first communion, we travelled somewhere else. For example, for my brother's, we went to Paris. And for mine, we went to Madrid.

I remember very, very distinctly the feeling of being in El Prado and standing in front of *Las Meninas*. My mother and father always talked openly about their love of Velázquez's work. Later on, I walked through the museum and got to Goya's *Second and Third of May* paintings as well as his *Black Paintings*. As soon as I saw *Saturn Devouring His Son*, my mother said, 'Don't look at that one.' But it was such a strong painting. It was just in those few seconds I got to see it that it really stayed with me throughout the rest of the trip; I couldn't leave it. I remember feeling slightly haunted by it but also not fully understanding it because, although in churches you can find some morbid stuff, there was something about the brutality of Goya's painting, and also the size of Saturn's son, which was painted like a grown human body. I don't know. It was really something that stuck with me.

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The next day we went to see Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* at Museo Reina Sofía. I think the amalgamation of those two things (El Prado and Museo Reina Sofía) and being unable to understand how anyone could paint something like that really hit me. But back then, like many kids, I wanted to play football professionally, so it was later on that I realised that was one of the things that pulled me to paint.



**You've said this show, *The Garden Dies with the Gardener*, couldn't have happened if not for your peers and their constant presence and conversations. Is there any talk you remember with particular fondness?**

To single out any one conversation, I don't have a memory like that. I very much just feel connected to my peers, and I feel brave because of the conversations. I feel brave because I feel seen by my peers. When someone feels seen, they're more able to be honest and vulnerable. So I think that's really what comes out of these relationships; it's like being present in each other's existence as living artists, as makers, and to be there for each other in the moments of both doubt and joy, to be able to celebrate together. So this companionship is more of a constant day-to-day thing. 'Hey, how are you doing?' more than any one specific conversation. At least that's where the love is for me.

**What would you like those who come to Peres Projects to see your exhibition in the coming weeks to feel?**

I would love for you to be able to feel whatever you're feeling. And by that I mean that if you need to take a little break, I want you to feel like you're allowed to sit on a bench and just rest in the space with the works. But there's really not one way I want people to feel; I don't even understand my own work emotionally. I can make up some rational idea of what it might mean, but if I truly think about it, I don't know to what extent it goes. So I just hope that people can feel the intimacy and that they can be in the presence of what I have been living with. And also, that they have a lovely day.

**And is there anything you can tell us about your next artistic projects?**

My next artistic project is moving to Mallorca for a while with the love of my life, Maya. So the coming artistic project is painting and just connecting to Mallorca, being with my family and just taking it day by day. These things grow slowly.

– Words by David Alarcón