

JOAQUÍN TORRES-GARCÍA: TOYS

January 27 – March 12, 2022

Ortuzar Projects is pleased to present *Joaquín Torres-García: Toys*, a survey of over sixty toys, paintings, drawings, and sculptures by the Uruguayan artist. Focused on the fifteen-year period from 1917–1932 in which he was actively making and marketing handmade wooden toys, the exhibition positions these objects made for children as a primary component of the artist's practice, as well as fundamental to the development of his theories of Universal Constructivism.

Torres-García's interests in toys can be traced back to his teaching activities as a young artist in Barcelona. Employed in 1907 as a teacher by the Mount D'Or school, Torres-García was exposed to the radical new pedagogies of Maria Montessori and Friedrich Fröbel, influenced in particular by the latter's notions that it is through play that children learn to establish a link between their inner world and the external world around them. Following the German educator's mystical conception of the universe—out of which came teaching methods and games based on the use of fundamental geometric shapes and symbols—Torres-García began to develop and publish similar theories around how the handling and combination of discrete forms, such as with the blocks that make up his toys, introduce children to avant-garde ideas around the abstract dimension of form and unity.

Following the closure of the school in 1914, Torres-García began creating toys as a way to support himself, first exhibiting them in a 1918 exhibition entitled *Joguines d'Art* ("Art Toys"), and beginning to market them under Aladdin Company Inc. in 1922 following his move to New York. At times dedicating his practice exclusively to fulfilling orders, Torres-García was committed to a kind of handicraft that was in stark contrast to the manufacturing of the day, designing all aspects of the marketing, and with the toys themselves cut, sanded, and painted by hand. Characterized by the fact that they are made of multiple detachable parts, the toys were designed in such a way that they could be assembled and disassembled again and again, encouraging the development of creativity.

As the itinerant artist moved across art capitals on both sides of the Atlantic, his toys developed in dialogue with shifts in his larger artistic practice. While the toys made in Barcelona bridge modernism with a romanticism of traditional craft, in line with the Catalan Noucentisme movement, in New York he was influenced by the dynamic nature of the city and its inhabitants. In a series titled *Funny People*, Torres-García portrayed the variety of human life he found in the city through a series of comic book-inflected metropolitan figures. This absorption of American pop culture also appears in the stand-alone *Harlequin* (c. 1921-22), which resembles Max Fleischer's famous cartoon short *Koko the Clown*. After moving to Paris in 1926 Torres-García's toy production began to reflect his engagement with Neo-Plasticism and friendship with figures such as Mondrian. Becoming more geometrical and abstract, the figures' begin to follow a frontal, gridded structure that attempts to unify the form of the wood and its painted surface. The division between his toys and artworks eroded even further with his *objetos de arte*, a series of wooden sculptures created between 1928 and 1932 that, while similar in appearance to the toys, are signed as unique works. While ultimately ceasing production of the toys by the time of his return to Uruguay and founding of the *Asociación de Arte Constructivo* in 1934, the significant period in which Torres-García created transformable toys charts the development of the flexible grid of his mature style, in which constituent parts can be brought together in infinite combinations to create a unified sense of a greater whole.

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A key figure in the transmission of modernism within the Americas, **Joaquín Torres-García** (b. 1874, Montevideo; d. 1949, New York) was widely regarded as one of the most important artistic figures in Latin America by the time of his death. He has been the subject of numerous museum exhibitions, including the Museo de arte Moderno, Madrid (1933), Musée national d'art moderne, Paris (1955), the Museo de bellas artes, Caracas (both 1980 and 1997), and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015). Torres-García's work is housed in museums and private collections throughout Europe, North and South America, including substantial holdings in the collections of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Musée National d'Arte Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and the Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales, Montevideo.