

An Anthological Biography:

Childhood:

Edgar Zúñiga Jiménez was born in 1950, in the city of Alajuela, in Costa Rica, the son of Manuel María Zúñiga Rodríguez and Consuelo Jiménez López, who were a widower and a widow, with ten and four children, respectively. Edgar grew up with siblings whose surnames were Zúñiga-Jiménez and Sandoval-Jiménez. Edgar's childhood was spent in the neighborhood yards, streets and coffee plantations, among plaster sculptures and figurines. He remembers: "My neighborhood was one of the poorest in Alajuela. Very young, I had to identify myself with poverty and my playground was the coffee plantation behind my house. Then, in school and high school I was known for a lack of discipline: I missed school often to go playing and in high school I ran away to go to the movies. My mother worked hard at her workshop and did not have time to check my homework, but, nevertheless, she was aware of what my activities were, and her sole presence was an example that influenced me as well as my education"

School:

Edgar Zúñiga went to elementary school at the "Escuela República de Guatemala", and then did his middle school years at the Alajuela Institute, and high school at the Alajuela's "Colegio Nocturno" and was awarded a secondary education diploma "Bachillerato". He applied at the University of Costa Rica and in 1968, with sculpture in his mind he was admitted at the School of Fine Arts. His stay in college, however, was rather short, since it was impossible for him to pass some introductory courses by proficiency and then he had to leave the School of Fine Arts. The young sculptor had no discipline or technical knowledge for a form of art he had pursued all his life, as for example, natural-size sculptures, models, drawing and coloring techniques.

The Workshop

Edgar's father, Manuel María Zúñiga, had built sort of a large barn in the back of their house in Alajuela to carry out some odd jobs and repairs, but he also had in mind to provide his son with some space for working and had him earn some money while he kept studying. Nevertheless, the barn became the ideal place for another purpose: a workshop for sculpting and creating figurines. So, at the young age of sixteen, Edgar had his own art workshop.

At the beginning, he was only his father's apprentice, performing simple tasks his father and his mother ordered. However, Edgar soon obtained his own assignments and started creating his own works, facing problems and formally resolving his own pieces of art. Through these efforts, he began producing a certain amount of religious images such as the "Resurrected Christ" (7 meters, in fiberglass with iron structure), located in Ciudad Quesada; "The Virgin of the Rocks", located in the city of Atenas, and the "Holy Trinity" (2.4 meters, in fiberglass), found in the church of Carrillos de Poás.

Even though he was outstanding in drawing and had a call for modeling with different materials, Edgar had to learn by himself and by experimenting, just like his father did, everything about working with bronze and wood carving. This exploration method allowed him to find his own artistic language, in these first stages. The lack of a formal college education made it difficult for him to advance in some area, and he had to study and find answers by himself during these times. Thus, Edgar resorted to books, hard work, and study, and by studying the works of art in those books he was evolving in his own style and developing his skills. By making images he learned by working in his workshop what he hadn't learned at college. This self-teaching practice taught him, from the very beginning, not to be afraid of experimenting with many different techniques, and quality is still present in his art up to to-day.

Family:

On December 25, 1973, Edgar Zúñiga married Rosibel Salas Araya, a biologist. Ever since that day, his wife became not only an inseparable companion but an art critic, too. They had four children: Xiomara (with a master's in literature), Verónica (with a master's in Cultural Enterprises Management), Tatiana (with a master's in arts), and Emmanuel, a student of Fine Arts at the University of Costa Rica, and a grandson, Adrián, son of Xiomara, studying architecture at the Latin University.

Figures:

In 1980 Edgar showed his first collective exposition with other artists from his native Alajuela at the "Juan Santamaría" Cultural and Historical Museum; the following year he set an exposition at the Costa Rican Museum of Art, in the Julian Marchena Hall, called "Twelve Contemporary Sculptors". Then he wrote: "In those years I saw a clearer artistic line in my works: I perceived myself as a total artist of imagery, mostly due to my beginnings as a religious images sculptor."

Within this line of figures and images, Zúñiga accepts a new challenge while considering the possibility of working with bronze. Together with his brother Franklin, he sets up a foundry workshop in Alajuela and works with bronze from the late 80s to 1995. During such period, his initial vocation of images changes with time but does not disappear. Now, in another stage, the artist engages in expressing himself with anatomical figures and torsions, accepting as a reference the works of Michelangelo and the balance and textures of Rodin, whose works he observed in books at his father's old workshop. This stage is also a period of transition where the influence of many other artists can be seen; one of such great influences is a very close source: his brother Francisco Zúñiga, who had lived in Mexico since 1935.

International Symposiums of Monumental Sculpture:

The last stage of his work is marked by a constant international appearance in many symposiums, contest, and cultural event in many places around the world, among them: Paraguay, Israel, the USA, Mexico, Brazil, Germany, and France. His participation in at least twenty symposiums also provided a chance of knowing foreign countries, visit their museums and art galleries, meeting artists and their art projects, from many different places and environments. This new perspective becomes an important reactivation of elements in his art work. It was during these years when Edgar was honored with an appointment as the director of COMAP (World Council of Plastic Artists), with headquarters in Mexico, and he took advantage of this appointment as the basis for the First Encounter of Plastic Artists of Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean, which took place in Costa Rica. He recalls: "During a visit to Jerusalem, I was invited to the Second Ibero-American Encounter of Plastic Artists, and I had to prepare works made in situ for an exposition. So, I went to a friend's workshop and in a corner I saw some old pieces of wood used in some construction. I chose a few and in them I carved some faces. Then I took those pieces and put them together in an ensemble I called "Harmony and Respect among Cultures". This ensemble, together with some other experiments I had done before with old pieces of wood ("Horcones", changed my mind and showed me a new path to follow. Then, when I returned from Jerusalem I had already decided what I wanted to do: during three months in a row I sculpted about fifty pieces which I showed in my exposition: "Stories of one town in Costa Rica".

“Horcones”

The exposition “Stories of one town in Costa Rica” at the National Gallery of the Costa Rican Center of Science and Culture consisted of fifty carved “horcones” (horcones are old columns or beams from demolished or very old houses). This series of works made one single “installation” or ensemble, and this new concept marked a new face in Edgar Zúñiga’s artistic life. Each piece of the ensemble had a face or an anatomic fragment sculpted on it and together they show groups of people as in a narration of everyday life and events such as a wake, a funeral, the family, sickness, couples, the street and similar situations. He remarks: “I want to make these ensembles: they make walk throughout time in a magical way, as if I am watching life down from a scaffold. It is my way of playing with space, of building life, and it takes me back to my times as a sculptor of religious images.”

Urban Sculptures:

In another stage of his work that continues today, Zúñiga is concentrating more in various projects of urban sculpture, both in Costa Rica and in foreign countries: “I am facing the need of taking my “horcones” concept to urban sculpture in order to solve the problem of this format as shown outdoors. Therefore, now I recur to iron and other format types. During this process my original sculptor inclinations and my interest in pre-Hispanic architecture show up, while I bring shapes such as the Meso-American ceremonial altars (“mutates”) or monumental architecture of famous temples such as *Tiahuanaco*, *Chichen-Itzá*, *Teotihuacán*, *Tula*, and even non-American such as *Stonehenge* and *Iberic menhirs*. *These themes were shown before in some of my bronze works, but it is in these pieces where I have found the ideal merging between the material and the shape. By using many other elements such as stone, screws, wood and pictograms, I modify the conceptual meaning of a work, and I provide an interpretation that comes from the intrinsic meaning of those materials and shapes.*”

We may say that participation in those International Symposiums of Sculpture were the inspiration for his using materials such as iron and stainless steel. The introduction of these new materials in his works is providing the artist with new expressive possibilities.