

The Trinity College Dublin Art Collections

Artist: Sebastián

Title: *Chac Mool*, 2002

Medium: spray painted mild steel

Dimensions: height 165 x length 320.5 x depth 130.5cm

Notes: Donated by the artist in 2004, supported by The Embassy of Mexico in Ireland
b. Chihuahua, Mexico, 1947

Enrique Carbajal González was born in Chihuahua, Northern Mexico, shortly after the end of the Second World War. A patriot throughout his life, he currently lives and works in Mexico City. The artist adopted the pseudonym 'Sebastián' after the painting of the martyred Saint Sebastian by Sandro Botticelli, the 15th century Italian Renaissance painter. He is best known for his monumental public sculptures, created using steel or concrete, which can now be seen throughout the world. There are currently four of these sculptures in Ireland, all of which have been generously donated by the artist.

His passion for art developed at a young age and he enrolled in the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas in Mexico City in 1965. He later went on to study at the San Carlos Academy before becoming a full time artist. As a student in the 1960s he was involved in the student protests against the Mexican government's financial and social policies in relation to the forthcoming Olympic Games to be held in Mexico. After the October Massacre, which saw dozens killed at a protest, Sebastián was arrested for his involvement. This had little impact on his career as an emerging artist and that same year he held his first solo exhibition, featuring mostly ceramic small-scale works, at the *Museo des Artes i Ciudad Juárez*.

His artistic style is fuelled by a fascination from early on in his career with the plastic possibilities of geometry. His work is influenced by Pablo Picasso and British sculptor Henry Moore, lending a Cubist association to his sculpture which is often based less in abstraction than it can first appear. Sebastián has worked on a number of collaborations with architects, and is a skilled furniture, jewellery, costume and stage designer himself; all of these arts inform his work as a sculptor. His earliest works are known as 'desplegables' or 'folders' - small paper works which are precursors of the monumental sculptures for which he would become famous. These later large-scale works can be seen throughout Mexico; 'gate' sculptures such as *Gran Puerta a México* in Matamoros, Tamaulipas and the *Puerta Chihuahua* have come to be seen as symbolic entry points to the cities in which they reside. Other works further afield include the *Phoenix Arch* in Sakai, Japan, which has become an icon of the city. Perhaps his most famous work, however, is *El Caballito* in Mexico City standing outside the *Torre del Caballito*, which hosts offices of members of the Mexican government.

The Trinity College Dublin Art Collections

Since 1968, more than 170 exhibitions of his work have been staged in Mexico, Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Spain, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, England, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, Canada, Finland, the United States, France, Japan, Switzerland and Venezuela. He is also a celebrated educator and taught at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México for 25 years, as well as concurrent periods teaching with other institutions during that time. The Fundación Cultural Sebastián was founded in 1997 as a non-governmental organisation to promote Mexican cultural values, especially the arts. He has also been awarded four honorary doctorates from Mexican universities, while in 1983 he became the first Mexican citizen to be named Member Honorarium of the Royal Academy of Visual Arts of The Hague, a title awarded by the Queen of Holland. In 1994, Sebastián was distinguished by Egypt as guest of honour at the Cairo Biennial and in 1999 his monumental sculpture was the subject of a show in Paris, where he was awarded the "*Médaille de Ville de Paris*".

The term *Chac Mool* refers to a style of ancient Mesoamerican sculpture found in temples and sacred sites throughout Central Mexico. Appearing as a vehicle between man and the gods, it traditionally depicts a reclining figure with its legs bent upwards, resting on its elbows and with its face looking out over its shoulder. The figure often supports a bowl or plate on its stomach. This specific type of sculpture was discovered in the 19th century by an archaeologist who named it after the greatest Mayan warrior, *Chac Mool*. As the artist explains, the colour blue was traditionally used to signify members of the priesthood in ancient frescoes and manuscripts. Although there has been little agreement by historians and anthropologists as to the function or meaning of these ancient sculptures, one interpretation is that they were created to commemorate fallen warriors and allow others to offer gifts to the gods in their memory. Over time it was discovered that more *Chac Mool* sculptures were found in central Mexico than in Mayan territory, leading experts to explore the link between these sculptures and sacrificial Aztec customs.

On campus here at Trinity College Dublin, Sebastián's *Chac Mool* reinforces a powerful sculptural lineage, associating itself most particularly with Henry Moore's work in Library Square, entitled *Reclining Connected Forms* (1969). Moore stated that, from an early stage, he was captivated by Mexican sculpture, particularly by the *Chac Mool* figure, leading him in 1929 to carve his own *Chac Mool* in Hornton stone which he later described as one of the key works of his career, now on display in The Leeds Art Gallery in England. It is this interest in "forms that really existed and worked against each other"* that led Moore to develop his world renowned reclining figures. Sebastián's turquoise *Chac Mool* is a vital, contemporary invitation to engage with figure, form, colour and sculpted space within a rich visual arts ancestry.

*Henry Moore quoted in Ionel Jianou, *Henry Moore*, translated by Geoffrey Skelding, Arted, Paris 1968, pp.28-9