

## Thinking of Fray Ramón Pané: A portrait of modern subjectivity

The Barbier-Mueller Museum of Pre-Columbian Art of Barcelona was formed in 1997 from the collections of Joseph Mueller and Jean Paul Barbier. The goals of the museum are to preserve the objects in its care, which by their high quality are considered to be masterpieces of Pre-Columbian art, to spread the collection through thematic exhibitions, to energise investigation and reflection around Amerindian cultures and their forms of representation, to activate cultural and education programmes within the city and to collaborate with other cultural institutions to promote the knowledge of pre-Columbian cultures.

### Objectives

- To study in depth the historical figure and writings of Ramón Pané (in particular his *Relación sobre las antigüedades de los indios*, 1494-1498) as a model for dialogue between cultures;
- To create an interdisciplinary space for knowledge production, in which all participants are actively consulted and involved;
- To give voice to different groups, starting from the acknowledgement of the museum as a space for the construction of intercultural dialogue.

### Process

Within the framework of MAP for ID, the Barbier-Mueller Museum coordinated a pilot project highlighting the figure of Fray Ramón Pané, a hermit monk who accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the Americas. Pané lived with the inhabitants of the island of Hispaniola (La Española) and was charged with describing the uniqueness of the Taíno culture.

Fray Ramón Pané is considered by some historians to be the first ethnographer of the New World, and to that extent his texts and personality can serve as a road map to reflect on how the image of the “other” is constructed and conveyed. In particular, his above-mentioned *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* provided a model of approach and contact with the Amerindian cultures and peoples.

The pilot project revolved around the exhibition ‘The pre-Columbian Caribbean - Fray Ramón Pané and the universe Taino,’ an important investigation on Taína culture and religious forms of symbolic representation co-produced by the Ministry of Culture, the Museo de América, the British Museum, the Caixa Galicia foundation and the Barbier Mueller Museum.

Three workshops with a common structure were held in the exhibition venues (Museo Barbier Mueller in Barcelona, Caixa Galicia in Santiago de Compostela, Museo de América in Madrid), comprising:

- An analysis of Pané’s text;
- An investigation of the aesthetic and symbolic value of the objects displayed in the exhibition;
- A debate on the artefacts and imagery of the Taínos, and on the figure and work of Fray Ramón Pané.

One of the main objectives of the workshops was that people who attended should understand the experiences, values and fears that Fray Ramón Pané and the Taínos

shared, as well as the ideas they hid from each other. The workshops also questioned whether their relationship was one of observation or dialogue.

Workshop participants (small groups of about 10-15 people for each event) were selected among groups from different backgrounds: specialists in the figure of Fray Ramón Pané, Taíno culture or the first contact between Spanish and Amerindian cultures; specialists in different areas of knowledge who could bring different approaches to the text; collaborators from the partner museums; students and public interested in the subject.

The participation of specialists in particular supported an interdisciplinary approach to the subject, with presentations including: *Mythological narration and image*, *The vision of the other in the dawn of the Modern Age* and *Meeting of Civilizations: The cultural shock in the Antillean world*.

### **Outcomes**

- *Thinking of Fray Ramón Pané* promoted a process of interdisciplinary knowledge construction, where there were no mediators between knowledge and project participants, but all were actively involved in a productive dialogue;
- The project also put in place a device that managed to create a small community of reflection on the ability to start an intercultural dialogue. Something intangible, but with a significant transformative potential in terms of approaching a text or a historical figure from a different perspective;
- Partner museums acknowledged the importance of establishing a different, more participatory relationship with target groups through the development of activities complementing their exhibitions;
- A joint document was developed from the final recommendations of the three workshops that can become an outline for approaching our relationship with otherness.

### **Institution**

Museo Barbier-Mueller de Arte Precolombino  
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### **Target groups**

Specialists in the project's theme; specialists in different areas of knowledge who could bring different approaches to Fray Ramón Pané's writings; collaborators from the partner museums; students and general public interested in the subject