

# MARITZA DOMINGUEZ NELSON

## SCULPTOR



When I look at an iron sculpture, amazed at the physical effort it requires, it takes me back to the blacksmiths in cowboy movies. I'm referring to those strong and noble broad-backed giants with a hammer of Thor in their hands, the sort of man no one would want problems with. And they didn't usually have them, as they were rarely involved in the town's brawls or drunkenness. They were sensible and peaceful, somewhat surly and short on words, but well able to give good advice and, although solitary, they usually had good friends. This same thoughtful attitude made them great keepers of secrets.

I wonder where their authority came from, why they were so respected. The answer is easy: they ensured mobility and identification in the region by making horseshoes and cattle branding irons, without which the Wild West would have been chaos. In addition to these instruments of peace we must add those of war: the spears, swords and shields forged by their predecessors.

On this road to the past we reach a basic fact: those who work with iron work with fire. Fire is not only a means to shape iron, iron is also a material for fire to be expressed. The first blacksmiths and fire tamers were Hephaestus for the Greeks and Vulcan for the Romans. Both created armor for the gods; both were lame, burly and rather ugly. This intimidating ugliness is probably due to the nature of their craft. To face the fire and suffer its attacks near the anvil and the forge, even with sophisticated present day equipment, gives you a pretty bad appearance and leaves you exhausted. However, those mythological heroes were very fortunate in love, at least for a while.

Hephaestus designed such a beautiful and seductive throne for Hera, queen of all the gods, that she could not come down from it. As a condition to release her he asked for Aphrodite's hand and it was granted. Vulcan married Venus when he was already old. But both relationships were short lived. It must be hard for a goddess to hear such beating, such noise, and then wash the body of a man with persistent soot stains (no wonder a "blacksmith" in English). The two wives would go away with gods of war, Ares and Mars, who were totally dependent on the work of the abandoned husbands.

**Maritza** comes from the world of architecture, an art that requires elegance and contact with many disciplines. In her projects she developed a series of proposals on how to live in the Caribbean. Now she has entered into the art of dialogue with iron and fire, a task that makes her dress in apocalyptic war clothing, and therefore not very sociable. She is alone, linked to ancient traditions and facing the weight of materials that strain her and flames that dazzle her.

At first I wondered how and why Maritza came from architecture to iron sculpture. On seeing her works these questions no longer seem relevant. There are still sheets, though infinitely heavier than paper. There are still drawings, but now each imagined line is a slow and arduous groove. The same laws of any structure still exist, but she now risks being crushed by it while she is working. There is still the search to become one with the work, to exist with it, to be in it.

In observing these suggestive series and progressions that open the path to her soul as creator and mine as spectator, I understand why I return again and again to the foundational work of the first blacksmiths, to that constant idea of mobility and identification, and I no longer wonder what came first and what happened after. Life is one and goes by quickly, unless you have the power of fire in your hands and time ceases to exist.

Federico Vegas