



**Santiago Sierra**

**LA VORÁGINE**

Press Release

**opening: January 18, 2024, from 6PM**

**January 18 – March 08, 2024**

Via G. Ventura 6 - Via Massimiliano, Milano  
[www.prometeogallery.com](http://www.prometeogallery.com)

As from Thursday 18 January 2024, the spaces of **Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani** will host the latest works by artist **Santiago Sierra** (Madrid, 1966). Presented at **LA VORÁGINE** are two diverse yet complementary explorations, *Los Embarrados* (2022) and *The Maelström* (2023).

The efforts of 1300 workers and a set consisting of 275 m3 of heavy mud covering a 2414 m2 space as well as a looped 30' minute chant accompanying a new black and white video piece by the artist, shot in The Gambia in May 2023 span over the two floors of the gallery.

On occasion of Sierra's 2005 installation *House in Mud*, the floors and walls of the German institution Kestnergesellschaft in Hannover were covered and smothered in 320 cubic metres of soil - a mixture of mud and peat - alluding to the neighboring Masch Lake, an artificial water reservoir commissioned by the government and created in order to compensate as an unemployment-relief program in the 1930s. In 2022, the artist reenacted his piece in monumental dimensions in Paris as *Los Embarrados*, which became a temporary decaying stage, a sunken boggy pit, for invited elite spectators to witness a luxurious show, acting as radical commentary on labour and worker rights.

*"Europe is a garden. We have built a garden. [...] The rest of the world, [...] most of the rest of the world is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden. The gardeners should take care of it, but they will not protect the garden [...] the jungle has a strong growth capacity, and the wall will never be high enough in order to protect the garden. The gardeners have to go to the jungle"*. Extracted from a speech by Josep Borrell – EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – the infernal hymn repeats itself until the video, central to the exhibition, grows into an all-consuming, kaleidoscopic vortex. On the floor and against the wall, young Gambian footballers mimic police arrest stances as if choreographed, a whirlpool of silhouettes; their faces undisclosed.

*LA VORÁGINE* responds to violent economies of exploitation as Sierra's recruited workforce, comprised of individuals from distinct geopolitical and ethnic backgrounds as well as marginalized groups, devote and sell their precious time and power to dismantle authoritative narratives, breaking down oppressive societal structures and threatening capitalism's seemingly irreversible current state.

## **Biography**

**Santiago Sierra** was born in Madrid (Spain) in 1966, where he still lives and works.

After graduating in Fine Arts from the Complutense University of Madrid, Santiago Sierra completed his artistic training in Hamburg, where he studied under professors F. E. Walter, S. Brown and B. J. Blume. His beginnings are linked to the alternative artistic circuits of the Spanish capital - El Ojo Atómico, Espacio P - although he will continue to develop most of his career in Mexico (1995-2006) and in Italy (2006-2010). His work has always had a great influence on literature and art criticism. Sierra's work seeks to reveal the perverse networks of power that inspire the alienation and exploitation of workers, the injustice of labor relations, the unequal distribution of wealth produced by capitalism, the deviance of work and money, racial discrimination in a world marked by unidirectional migratory flows (south-north).

By revisiting and reworking some strategies that characterize the minimalist, conceptual and performative art of the Sixties and of the Seventies, Sierra interrupts the flows of capital and goods (*Obstruction of Freeway With a Truck's Trailer*, 1998; *Person Obstructing a Line of Containers*, 2009); he hires workers to reveal their precarious conditions (*20 Workers in a Ship's Hold*); he explores the mechanisms of racial segregation derived from economic inequalities (*Hiring and Arrangement of 30 Workers in Relation to Their Skin Color*, 2002; *Economical Study of The Skin of Caracans*, 2006); and he refutes the stories that legitimize a democracy based on state violence (*Veterans of the Wars of Cambodia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq Facing the Corner*, 2010-2012; *Los encargados*, 2012).

In 2010, he received the Spanish National Award for Plastic Arts but he publicly rejected it by claiming his independence from a state which shows "contempt for the mandate to work for the common good". In 2018, Sierra included a portrait of Carles Puigdemont into the exhibition "Contemporary Spanish Political Prisoners", in Madrid. It was ordered to be removed on February 23, 2018. In 2020, Sierra invited First Nations peoples, from places colonized by the British empire, to donate blood for the artwork *Union Flag*; the "Dark Mofu" festival cancelled plans to show the work after a backlash led by Indigenous Australian artists.