Nottingham Contemporary

Weekday Cross, Nottingham, NG1 2GB
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Francisco Tún: *Solo Mirando* (*Just Looking*) at Nottingham Contemporary

Sat 6 Feb – Sun 2 May 2027
Private View: Fri 5 Feb



Francisco Tún, Untitled, Undated, Oil on canvas. Courtesy Private Collection.

Nottingham Contemporary is excited to present the first international institutional solo exhibition of the late Indigenous Guatemalan artist Francisco Tún (1948- 1989).

A self-taught visionary whose singular style defies easy categorisation, Tún was raised in a working-class Indigenous family. In 1969, Tún gained critical attention when his painting *El fruto del alcohol* caught the eye of French art critic Edith Recourat at the national Shell painting competition. Recourat became a champion of his art, facilitating his debut solo exhibition in 1970 at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas.

Over the next two decades, Tún developed an unmistakable visual language - expansive colour fields punctuated by minute human figures, at once intimate and monumental. Painted on surfaces ranging from canvas to wood and textiles, his works balance bold chromatic simplicity with an emotional depth that reflects solitude, resilience, and a profound sense of place.

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Despite his early acclaim, Tún vanished from the art scene. He died or disappeared in 1989, leaving behind a remarkable body of work. The term "Tunmania" was coined to describe the resurgence of appreciation he received in later years in Guatemala, but his work has remained largely unseen outside his home country.

This exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary marks the first time Tún's paintings will be presented to international audiences, and will display approximately 40 original paintings, offering a long-overdue opportunity to encounter an artist whose vision was forged entirely outside the structures of academic art, yet whose originality resonates far beyond national borders.

About the Artist

José Francisco Tún was born on August 18, 1948, in Guatemala City into an Indigenous (ladino) family from the neighbourhood of La Limonada. His formal education ended in third grade, and he initially supported himself as a car washer.

After gaining critical attention in 1969 when French art critic Edith Recourat ecountered his painting in the national Shell painting competition, Tún's style matured through the 1970s and 1980s. A natural colourist, his palette ranged from subdued browns and greys to vibrant blues, yellows, lilac, and crimsons, and separated him from the popular painters of Guatemala's Atitlan and Comalapa. He created a style undoubtedly filled with symbolism that chronicled daily life.

Tún's works were described by Edith Recourat as belonging to the category of 'popular urban painting' since their compositions reflect visions of the habitats of Guatemala City where he lived and responded to images and stimuli of daily life. He painted evocative urban and rural scenes using acrylics or industrial enamel on diverse surfaces - wood, textiles, even cradles or vessels - creating flattened, expansive colour fields. Their simplicity carried emotional weight, evoking solitude, poignancy, and existential reflection.

Tún's compositions felt dreamlike, transcending both naïve and abstract traditions. He remained resolutely original – as Recourat wrote, "nothing is invented, and everything is new."

For more information about Francisco Tún and other exhibitions at Nottingham Contemporary, please visit our website.

Solo Mirando (*Just Looking*) is curated by Salma Tuqan assisted by Klara Szafrańska.

This exhibition was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Francisco Tún Exhibition Circle.

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Notes to Editors:

Francisco Tún: *Solo Mirando (Just Looking)* is showing alongside Enzo Camacho & Ami Lien with Arianna Mercado, Yuji de Torres & Dominic Zinampan: *Our Creativity Belongs to the Masses*.

Currently showing (until 10 Jan 2027): Julia Isídrez: *Mud is everything* and Sarah Cunningham: *Midnight Sun*

For more information and images please contact:

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About Nottingham Contemporary
Nottingham Contemporary is one of the leading centres of contemporary art in Europe. Since opening in 2009, we have welcomed over 2.6 million visitors – with free admission for all – to our highly ambitious programme that has featured hundreds of artists and cultural practitioners from across the globe.

Our programme champions international art and artists who invite us to imagine the world in new ways, and empower different perspectives into the most pressing cultural, social, and political questions of today. We support artists at different stages of their careers – from first-time solo shows in the UK to surveys of renowned or overlooked figures – and regularly present significant thematic exhibitions and major artist–curated projects. Nottingham Contemporary is supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

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