Anda: the “constructor” sculptor

Although not unique in contemporary sculpture, the case of José Ramón Anda Goikoetxea is quite unusual to say the least. Despite his prestigious reputation, Anda’s work is still relatively obscure and to a great extent ignored. Although any sculpture buff who’s seen an exhibition of his, or even photographs of his works in journals and books, knows an Anda sculpture when he sees one, very few people really know how his work has developed during his thirty-year art career.

From the beginning, back in the mid-1970s and throughout almost all of the 80s, José Ramón Anda’s sculptures were held in high esteem, particularly in the Basque Country. His sculptures were photographed and published in a huge number of catalogues, at home he took first prize at the San Sebastián Sculpture Biennial in 1983, the year he was also awarded the Gure Artea prize in sculpture. Much the same happened in the rest of Spain, his work being included in the Salon of the 163 in 1983, after a major exhibition at the Galería Egam in Madrid. He took first prize at the second Sculpture Biennial in Jaca (1983) and exhibited his work individually and in group exhibitions in Barcelona. But everything changed on 20 January 1989 when Anda was 39: on the short walk—just 300 metres—from his workshop studio to his home he was hit by a car and seriously injured. At the time he was preparing an exhibition programmed for the Bilbao Museum of Fine Arts, which in the end was never held3. Since then Anda has struggled on, working day to day, stubborn and thoroughgoing, without lowering his standards, making sculptures and holding exhibitions, and becoming something of a cult artist in the process. All of which fully justifies this all-too-brief review of the Navarra-born artist’s career and the way his work has developed to the present day.

Training and early works

Anda’s time at the San Fernando Fine Arts Academy in Madrid (1970-1974) was particularly important both for his formal training and from a personal point of view4. While there he took his first steps in both abstract and figurative creation, steps that almost certainly marked the origin of the versatility—maintained without renouncing or in opposition to anything, successively or alternatively—of Anda’s approach to the radical dichotomy between abstraction and figuration that was such a major feature of art in the first half of the 20th century. It also goes some way to explaining his approach to the traditional division between carving and modelling, which, as historian Rudolf Wittkower explained, began with Pliny, came clear with Alberti in the Renaissance and lasted five centuries more. A division that Eric Gill described in 1918 with absolute clarity: “Modelling is a process of addition, while carving is one of subtraction.”

Early on, towards the end of his training at San Fernando, Anda embarked on a process of decompositions of form in carving, based on geometric figures like the cube5 (1973); he would reap the very considerable rewards of this exploration in the work produced immediately afterwards. I refer to major artworks such as Homage to Juan de Antzieta6, 1979-1986), a slightly off-

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1 Prize-winners at the 2nd Gure Artea were Dario Urzay (Painting) and José Ramón Anda (Sculpture).
2 This, the third Salon of its kind, was held in Madrid at the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art, in spring/summer 1983. Artists selected to show works included José Freixanes, Don Herbert, Antón Patoño, Luis Canelo, Marta Cárdenas, Juan Uslé, Pedro Simón, Cristóbal Domínguez, Gines Sánchez Hevia, Fernando Almela, Andrés Nagel, Xavier Grau, Angeles Marco, Gemma Sin, Guillermo Chamorro and José Ramón Anda.
3 No explanation was given. The cancellation was a bitter pill for the sculptor, particularly as the offer of an exhibition, with dates included, came from the Museum itself is the shape of an official letter.
4 At the time, seven students per year studied sculpture at the San Fernando Academy, and 70 painting, which gives an idea of the intensity of academic and personal relationships between students and teachers. Teachers and sculptors such as Francisco Toledo (Rome Prize and a connoisseur of contemporary Italian sculpture), Cruz Solis (Rome Prize and stone- and wood-carving teacher) and Eduardo Gapa were important figures in Anda’s training.
5 Anda exhibited his work for the first time at the age of 23 in 1973, in the company of fellow students from the San Fernando Academy. At the Club of Friends of the UNESCO in Madrid. Anda contributed two sculptures involving the Decomposition of the cube, which, looking back, are obvious harbingers of what would in time become one of Anda’s most rewarding areas of exploration. These early works led to a major series of straight-line and curvilinear sculptures in wood.
6 Juan de Anchicteta was an extraordinary 16th-century sculptor much admired by Anda. Considered a member of the Spanish school of Michelangelo, by whom he was greatly influenced, Anchicteta’s most important works include a number of altar-pieces is the Convent of Santa Clara and the altar of Santa Casilda in Briviesca, The Trinity is Jaca cathedral, the St. Peter Set Free relief in the Zumaya altar-piece; a number of works in La Seo Cathedral in Zaragoza and several works in Navarra. These include a reredos in the church at Tafalla, another in the churches of Aiz and Berastegui and, finally, in Pamplona cathedral, where he is buried, with an epitaph that Anda has always liked: “His work he did not praise nor those of others revile.” For more background on Juan de Anchicteta, see the art journal Goya, nios. 74/75, September-December 1966, entirely devoted to Michelangelo.
centre cube in Lastur limestone measuring 2 by 2 by 2 meters sited in the Hiru-Bide park in Pamplona, and the sculpture Un punto de luz y equilibrio (A point of light and balance, 1979-2003) on the University of Navarra campus, involving a 1.10-metre cube of black granite with a 1.8-metre long arm, and in curving geometry to the piece entitled En el aire (In the air, 1978-2002), a mobile that has had a number of wonderful versions, from one in wood to the one outdoors in Tolosa with a 4 by 4 by 7-metre structure in iron and a central piece in aluminium 1.5 metres in diameter.

These works had their origins in two important cube-based works, the Decomposition of the cube in tetrahedrons and combinatorial I (1972), and the rather more complex Decomposition of the cube in tetrahedrons and combinatorial II (1972), with the decomposition of six pyramids shifted off-beam to configure a diamond shape, triggering a wide range of intermediate figures. These works put us in mind of US artist Sol Lewitt's explorations at around the same time.

Anda also inaugurated a renewal in figurative Spanish sculpture, by introducing in his works influences from much of contemporary Italian sculpture, particularly the three leading figures of modern sculpture, the "three Ms": Arturo Martini, Giacomo Manzù and, in particular, Marino Marini. The latter's influence is clearly perceptible, above all in the hands and head in the modelling of the superb work entitled Un hombre viejo pero vigoroso (Old, but still vigorous, 1973), a nude that may recall his father and which he modelled in clay at the Academy, at the age of 24, as his final exercise in the fourth year. It immediately interested his teacher Eduardo Capa who awarded it a prize, facilitating the sculpture's transfer to polyester and then to bronze at his foundry in Arganda. The work is now on display at the Capa Foundation in Santa Bárbara castle, Alicante.

With the Rome Scholarship under his belt in 1974, his time at the Spanish Academy in Rome strengthened his links with Italy, where he had the chance to see for the first time and at first hand Roman art and sculpture by Filarete, Donatello, Michelangelo, Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Antonio Canova. It also gave him an opportunity to see what contemporary Italian sculptors were doing, particularly Marino Marini and Giacomo Manzù, whose work he had seen in illustrations only. From that time are three outstanding works that clearly show Anda under the influence of Rome. First is his wood carving Cabeza de Unamuno (Head of Unamuno, 1975), which was subsequently cast in bronze in the early 1990s. The work provoked the unreserved admiration of sculptors of the standing of Jorge Oteiza, a major figure for Anda, not so much formally but more as an agitator and a permanent source of ideas. "The best idea fits in the palm of the hand" was a favourite saying of his, and this is true of Anda's small, modelled sculpture entitled Mujer embarazada (Pregnant woman, 1975), subsequently cast in bronze. Here it is perhaps possible to appreciate the kind of extreme delicacy to be found in some works of Giacomo Manzú. It also reflects the stimulus the sculptor has always found in the figure of the pregnant woman, as, we recall, did Picasso. While still under the influence of Rome and, more importantly, of Michelangelo, Anda produced a highly impressive arm with a closed fist carved in wood entitled En pie (On the march, 1977). More than two metres high, En pie was executed in the middle of Spain's uneasy political transition and was shown again recently (2004) in a retrospective exhibition on those years at the Ganbara of the Kolodo Mitxelena arts centre in San Sebastián —Disidentziak Oro, 1972-1982—. This powerful work has stood the test of time perfectly.

During his stay in Rome, Anda came into contact with other grant holders and disciplines. Today he still keeps in touch with figurative painter Clara Gangutia and the architect and engraver Eduardo López de Arigita, who were then his closest friends. Back then he also became closely involved in some very different areas that were thriving in the city at the time, including film and, particularly, contemporary architecture, design and even

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2 In 1974 Anda visited the Manzù Foundation in Ardea on the outskirts of Rome, with the support of the Academy, the director being Juan Antonio Morales. Earlier, in 1970, Rudolf Wittkower, undoubtedly the most influential and important art and architectural historian for much of the 20th century, had described Manzù, born in 1908, as the leading Italian sculptor of the day, mainly because of his "talent for refined and delicate surfaces." See R. Wittkower, La escultura: procesos y principios, Alianza Forma, Madrid, 1980, pp.308-309.
window dressing in the Via Condotti and environs. Although markedly different, all these fields of interest on occasions stress the constructive element and on others the strictly visual. Both aspects had a central role in his training.

It is surely no coincidence, as far as the constructive and architectural sense is concerned, that models and three-dimensional studies should have had such a major role in his creative assays, carried out in the early phases of his creative process, as opposed to drawing, which the sculptor has always used to solve partial problems.

That apart, Anda is a man of a remarkable visual judgement, one who brings an extraordinary taste and refinement to the way he sees things. This discriminating delicacy comes from a culture made of images, sensations and experiences. It’s worth repeating that the core of his training was the constructive and visual sense, discovering things for himself from his own experience, which is what all artists do, beyond their formal training, academic studies and readings at school, which rarely leave much trace.

A further factor in Anda’s training—noticeable from very early on—was his taste for materials, a singular knowledge and understanding of the raw materials of art. At the beginning of his career, he was particularly attracted to wood—oak, chestnut, walnut, boxwood and cherry—and other materials, each one of which was a world of its own: alabaster, stone, bronze, steel, aluminium, and, later on, marble.

Materials make a particularly interesting subject where Anda is concerned. To begin with, critics and experts are prone to confusion when they talk about materials, particularly wood, in Anda’s works. A further problem is that today one frequently hears talk of the “recovery” of materials; but this is in fact a new formula of naturalism that has nothing to do with the way Anda uses them.

Born in 1949 in Bakaiu (Navarra), José Ramón Anda grew up in the family carpentry workshop, his father being both a master carpenter and a magnificent wood carver. This was a crucial factor in Anda’s education in the culture of materials, as from early childhood he had the highly unusual opportunity, unique in contemporary sculpture, of absorbing the qualities and the tradition of the techniques for building in wood. Besides an exhaustive knowledge of nature and the development of trees throughout the Basque region and of the timber drying sheds and saw mills, the technical resources of a long tradition of construction in wood, some virtually forgotten, others actually invented by his father, were handed down to him. Anda has never forgotten this rootedness in a genuinely popular art and culture.

Another subject worth mentioning is his relationship with crafts, itself a source of some confusion, particularly as his has never been a non-problematic, or simply cordial, involvement. Although Anda has a so-

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9 With his friends from the Spanish Academy in Rome, Anda joined two film clubs, which he attended regularly in Piazza Navona.
10 Predominant at the time was the Tendenza, a remarkably influential movement captained by Italian architect Aldo Rossi. La Tendenza was highly productive in terms of vocations in schools of architecture, and as an analytical basis for memorable urban studies and historical studies, but was disastrous for its followers and for its influence on the architecture of the period, which lasted until well into the 1980s.
11 Debate on architectural and design issues between the architect Eduardo López de Arigita and José Ramón Anda in those months in Rome must have been constant. Despite signs of decline, Italian design was still extraordinary. Particularly important to Anda’s subsequent development were the designs of architects Vico Magistretti and, most significantly, of Carlo Scarpa.
12 Models, mostly studies in clay, wire, cardboard and plaster, are the archive of Anda’s oeuvre. The clay models on the shelves in his studio provide a truly marvellous visual experience.
13 “Obviously the environment I was brought up in had a decisive influence on my dedication to sculpture. I don’t remember the exact moment I became captivated by all this, it’s like you asking me when I learnt to walk. What I do remember vividly is as a child seeing the furniture my father made, furniture in the Renaissance or the Louis Quinze style, wonderful pieces of furniture that my father extracted from the wood before my very eyes.” Juan Zapater interviewing J.R. Anda, published 5 April 1986 in the Navarra Hoy newspaper.
14 His father learnt the carpenter’s trade and wood carving in Pamplona, Vitoria, Bilbao and in the Barcelona of the 1920s, where he lived through the decline of Modernisme and the full splendour of Noucentisme. He returned to the Basque Country from Barcelona after the 1929 World Fair when the economic crisis became unbearable.
mewhat violent relationship with wood, his dealings with assistants and collaborators are respectful and marked by his efforts to encourage and stimulate. He makes the people working with him do things that have fallen into disuse or been forgotten with time. His relationship with the tradition of wood is always one of genuine challenge. José Ramón Anda is not only a poet who loves wood\textsuperscript{15}, or a master craftsman who knows what do at every turn to avoid risks; he actually subjects the wood to violence, giving it some rough treatment with clamps, brackets or stretcher pieces (what the sculptor has called “underground work”), to get what he wants from the material. It is never a question of surrendering to the material he uses, to wood, the organic material \textit{par excellence}, but rather a genuine struggle in the search for differences and for material limits, which occasionally exhausts the artist physically and mentally until, once he has recovered and come through what we might call the “stabilization phase”, he finally dominates the material. The artist’s terror of losing control over the way forms evolve and develop is never far away. He is not a sculptor in the traditional sense, being more of a “constructor” in the way Jorn Utzon in architecture (“The Innermost Being of Architecture”, 1948) is, with a very strong crafts component in his creative work and more than a few features of character in common. “A natural recluse” and “intensely private” and completely free of the “artistic temperament” is how Richard Weston\textsuperscript{16} describes Utzon in his definitive essay. For Anda, composition is a question of dominating form as he works over time: “Unlike what happens in contemporary art, where the main, defining feature is the speed of execution, I work very slowly until I arrive at a piece that really fulfils me. Not only that, as you get older you tend to worry less about speed.”\textsuperscript{17}

His is a defined and concrete sculpture, “clear (not polished, as some have insinuated), highly delimited and concrete, without the expressive gesture of chisel or rasp ever appearing, or a single fissure.”\textsuperscript{18} Anda’s subsequent search for a certain dematerialization of the wood led him to leave prints of the tools used in his works, be it the plane work or the trace of the power saw cut, or finishes with plaster, sand blast and colour to play down the grain of the wood and endow the piece with uniformity and the feel and vision of a whole.

His work process is basically manual, empirical, workshop stuff. And you can see it in the work, which has a remarkable sensorial, tectonic quality to it. This accounts for the extreme sensuality noticeable in his sculpture from the beginning. Anda’s oeuvre invites the spectator to handle, touch and feel it as a true way to knowledge and pleasure.

Another important element, linked to the foregoing, and quite decisive in Anda’s training was his encounter with the work of Max Bill, which he saw at a memorable exhibition held at the Miró Foundation in Barcelona in 1980\textsuperscript{19}. Not that Anda was unaware of the work of the Swiss artist before the exhibition. The \textit{Nueva Forma} (\textit{New Form}) journal had devoted an entire issue to Max Bill in 1973. Besides, Anda’s relationship with Jorge Oteiza, particularly close since 1976\textsuperscript{20} when Oteiza visited an exhibition of the younger man’s work, had stimulated his interest in the highly versatile Max Bill, some of whose sculpture was done in wood.

For one of his first exhibitions, shared with architect and engraver Eduardo López de Arigita at the San Telmo Museum (1976), he produced the triangular twins called \textit{Dos cintas sin fin} (\textit{Two tapes without end}) and, shortly afterwards, a series of three marvellous sculptures in wood paying tribute to the sculptor’s favourite sport, hand \textit{pelota}, where the \textit{Decomposition of the sphere} as portrayed in the backstitching of the pelota ball leather seems to match or intuitively identify with some of the Swiss artist’s geometrical work and even with Utzon’s beautiful model for Sydney Opera House, also based on the sphere.

\textsuperscript{15} The most suggestive essay I know of on a question equally applicable to José Ramón Anda is by Antonio Gamoneda, \textit{Pasión de la madera} (“A passion for wood”) in the exhibition catalogue for \textit{Un bosque en obras. En la escultura española en madera} (“A forest of works. Spanish sculpture in wood”) at the Esteban Vicente Museum of Contemporary Art in Segovia and the Fundación Caja Madrid, 2000, p. 67-75, with illustrations of sculptures in wood by Joaquín Torres García, Julio González, Picasso, Ángel Ferrant, Alberto Sánchez, Esteban Vicente, Francisco Lasso, Eduardo Chillida, Moises Villena, Remigio Mendiburu, Adolfo Schlosser and Francisco Leiro. The catalogue also includes two works by Anda.


\textsuperscript{17} José Ramón Anda talking in 1992 to the \textit{El País} newspaper, as reported by Regina Valenzuela in \textit{El escultor José Ramón Anda exhibe sus esculturas mobiliarios en Barcelona} (“Sculptor José Ramón exhibits his furniture sculptures in Barcelona”), op. cit.

\textsuperscript{18} Interview with José Ramón Anda by José Luis Merino in \textit{Deia}, 1983


\textsuperscript{20} Anda met Oteiza for the first time in Madrid in the early seventies through Javier Aguirresarobe and Imanol Unbe.
Anda has been continuously identified with the works of Max Bill and with his idea of growth. Not so much with the ideologies of Concrete Art and its manifestoes as with the formal, Bauhaus-informed world of Max Bill that even led him, as we shall see later on, to become interested in typography, to the point where he has occasionally been referred to, not entirely unreasonably, as the “Spanish Max Bill.”

Anda is a sculptor of sculptural ideas. He often uses geometry to give form in space to the ideas that come during those sleepless nights that have proved so productive, when insomnia leads the sculptor to imagine in space, as American architect Frank Lloyd Wright was said to do, developing his projects in the mind before getting them down in drawings, or as the poet Salvador Espriu did, composing the lines of his poems in the long restless nights and then writing them down and retouching them on paper afterwards. Because a genuine creative artist, as Deleuze said in one of his last, highly suggestive essays written shortly before his tragic end, “does no more than the absolutely necessary.”

To resume, in early 1980 José Ramón Anda, after a solid training period, could already point to a considerable production as sculptor and artist based as it were on a tripod, the first leg being his academic training and his knowledge of contemporary European and Italian sculpture, the second his knowledge and understanding of materials, wood in particular, and the third, the direct encounter with the work of Max Bill and its geometry.

The result being an understanding of sculpture as the possibility of infinite variations on a single theme with a limited number of ingredients, which, to paraphrase Utzon’s definition of architecture, we might call “sculpture by addition.”

The early series

Three major series from the early eighties with the very Brancusian titles of Nudos (Knots), Ovoides (Ovoids) and Columnas (Columns), may be seen as prolongations or extensions of previous works and include some magnificent pieces. Brancusi turns up again, for instance, in the Knots series, also known as Circuits without end. In principle eight works occasionally seem to prolong, though on a different scale and in space, the previous Tapes without end, from now on with a major cylindrical section in wood. With hollowing or voiding gaining significance in these works, the occasional elimination of the pedestal when the work is on the scale of the human body also becomes important, as opposed to some previous works where the hand provided the reference. Although Max Bill’s influence once again filters through in some of these works, Knots as a whole bears the irreducible Anda signature; although the works are abstract, the constant sinuous line in this series seems to point to Michelangelo-esque origins. Around the same time, this series led to a spin-off, in the shape of a new series called Pasos-Puertas (Steps-Doors), which are sculptures or models designed to be placed on a pathway or a bend in the road, as the photomontage published at the time illustrates. Three sculptures or models of Doors were set up at sites in the country, inviting the spectator to go through and underneath to provoke a relation of proximity and scale that contrasted with the arid, highly cerebral nature of what was known as meta-sculpture, so much in vogue at the time. Anda’s understanding of his role as “constructor”, with a clear concern for the tectonics of materials, made him a most unusual case, something of a maverick as regards the dematerialization of the object so beloved of the “official”, teleological line of contemporary sculpture that saw art as progress.

Ovoids is a series of three. It is common knowledge that the ovoid is based on the sphere. Once again the origins of this series lie in a previous one, the one involving the pelota ball and the Decomposition of the sphere. The new series gave rise to three beautiful pieces with dynamic, mobile and highly sensual forms. The geometrically-based opposition between the pedestal and the ovoid (angular as opposed to rounded), texture (cold opposed to hot) and material (iron against wood),
the contrast between fixed and mobile elements, and the invitation to the spectator to explore the sculpture lightly through touch, is Anda’s way of getting people to pay attention to things and works, rather than having them look in an absent-minded or uninvolved way. Because for the artist most things, sculpture included, are discovered: what’s important is not what one sees superficially but what one discovers. Anda wants to ensure that nobody is indifferent to the experience of sculpture and that’s precisely what he achieves.

Another very interesting series, variations on a theme, from the eighties (although begun in the late 1970s and finished around 1986, is Columna and their combination. From the pure form of a cylinder and of sections producing an ellipse and through simple twists, torsions and additions give rise to a whole set of pieces in different types of wood, boxwood in the smallest, oak in the medium-sized and the large ones. At times this new series involves four leaning columns, on another occasion it uses the combination of three columns, which, though they are shown leaning, are in fact parallel to each other (1982), in another case the composition of two free-standing columns is included in a piece called ¡Oh! Italia (Oh, Italy! 1986), yet another is the result of the combination of two twinned columns called Txalaparta (1983) (which, turned upside down, was transferred to stone and integrated in an outdoors work measuring 2.50 metres in diameter entitled Oereta Ikastola (1984-1991)). Finally, from this series is an extraordinarily stylized single-column work entitled Goruntz (1980), 3.33 metres of oak, which actually includes the shavings from the work in progress on the floor. The shavings once again gently provoke the spectator to new interpretations, something very much to the taste of the sculptor in his bid not to let anyone be indifferent to the sculpture.

Another work related to this series is a sort of fallen column or large, slightly curved beam called Astazaldi (1984). This highly suggestive curved piece made from a piece of debris is the sculptor’s tribute to the powerful curved beam used as a truss in the kind of roofing found in popular architecture.

Also from the mid-eighties are a pair of highly significant wall sculptures, origin of a series of wall works that has lasted until the present day. One of these pieces, entitled Abedario (1981-1985), was executed in a combination, almost certainly for the first time, of oak and boxwood. To begin with, besides the incrustation of boxwood, rooted in Hispanic-Muslim culture, the work introduces two other issues: one is the formal play in the edges of the plane of the square in its relation to the wall, designed to make the work autonomous from the plane of the background; the other is an evident interest in typographical exploration of the kind Anda had already shown in a couple of Bauhaus-influenced posters promoting the Basque language in the early 1980s. Another very interesting wall work from those years is A Oteiza (To Oteiza, 1984-1987), where a cord that doesn’t quite close the circle, like the one in Abedario, stands out from the background. Not long after completing this work, in the early nineties, Anda executed the magnificent figural frieze-relief in wood representing the branches and leaves of an oak (1980), which, while embodying the qualities intrinsic to sculpture at all times, such as the conjunction of talent and skill, and evading the love of life and nature, evoked the conception and organic ornamentation of the works of the American architect Louis Sullivan. Finally the sculptor transferred the work to bronze and it is today the panel of the door of his home-cum-studio workstation.

What do these works mean? That is something I can’t be sure of, although I do think that they have something to do with Anda’s long-held determination to consider the past as part of one’s self and not break with what sculpture has been since time immemorial, by relating frieze, relief and bas-relief, doors, column shafts and obelisks as conceived until well into the 20th century with a present-day (contemporary) language.

Furniture sculptures

From the mid-eighties on, Anda moved on to a different constructive adventure involving a whole series of furniture sculptures. Basically this is a set of table-

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21 The txalaparta is a traditional Basque percussion instrument.
22 The Spanish word for alphabet (abecedario) minus the latter c, there being no letter.
23 The oak relief was part of an over-ambitious, all-absorbing idea that was never developed to make a mural with reliefs in chestnut, walnut and boxwood, where each one would represent its own forest.
sculptures, chair-sculptures and wardrobe-sculptures presented in Bilbao at the Windsor gallery in late 1987 with a small catalogue. After leaving the teaching post he had held for three years at the Bilbao School of Fine Arts, saturated by the phantasmagorical atmosphere, sometimes transcendental, at others intangible, of academia, Anda went back to the workshop to what we have already described as a manual, empirical and intuitive work process. He returned to the studio to play, to “have a bit of fun” with the potential of what might be termed functional-sculpture, in the same spirit that architecture is a functional-art, in the exemplary definition offered by German philosopher Theodor Adorno in his celebrated essay “Funktionalismus heute.”

This was not in fact the first time Anda had concerned himself with the theme of furniture. Back in the 1970s he had produced three furniture-models in alabaster for outdoor benches very much in the line of Henry Moore’s formal work. But it was in the second half of the eighties when he really got to grips with furniture from the perspective of sculpture.

As an object, the chair attracted an enormous amount of attention in the 20th century and approaches by architects to it produced examples of unquestionable interest. Architects of the standing of Mackintosh, Hoffmann, Kaare Klint, Rietveld, Marcel Breuer, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto, Charles and Ray Eames, Finn Juhl, Hans J. Wegner, Arne Jacobsen, Paul Kjaerholm and Frank Gehry all produced versions of the chair. Anda got to know the chair at first hand from his time in Rome in the 70s through Italian firm Cassina’s re-editions of some of the chairs produced by classic modern architects at the company display rooms on the Via Ripetta. Far from being discouraged, Anda saw these examples as a stimulus. When he eventually came to tackle the theme of the chair from his formal and constructive world, he knew what he was doing.

Chairs are generally made, like the Windsor, with the legs, the back and the arms (if they have them) fitted into the seat, or with the legs, the back and the arms (if they have them) joined by a structure that makes a single unit of seat, back and legs. This is the sort of construction used in Kaare Klint’s red chair.

The principle of separating the bearer structure of the seat and the back developed throughout much of the 20th century. In 1917 a Dutchman, G. T. Rietveld, object of several tributes by Anda, designed the famous red and blue chair in which all the parts of the construction were separate. Although undoubtedly conceived more as an artistic expression than as an attempt to build a genuine piece of furniture, it remains, even today, an interesting analysis of the chair as concept.

Despite basing his first set of furniture on the concept of separation, Anda chose not to neglect function and the demands of construction in wood. Not solely in terms of image, or solely as something to be seen, but also in terms of function and the material used, preferably oak, with which the sculptor has a long-standing and deeply-felt association: “I was born and grew up surrounded by oak trees, and I had seen many of the tree trunks I later used in my sculptures in the wood as a small boy. I know oak’s very hard to work, but it really speaks to me.”

He developed his ability to design elegant, flexible forms as he worked the various parts of the structure in wood.

Indeed, wood is a marvellous material that can be moulded, and which is strong and flexible when used in accordance with its nature. Two pieces of wood can be joined almost invisibly and the joints are often so tough that if the wood snaps under excess weight, the breakage almost always occurs somewhere other than the joints.

Particularly interesting in this set of furniture-sculptures are two (armless) coated oak chairs where the rounded parts of the back and the seat uphold the principle of separation between them, back and seat each with its legs. Being a tangential structure, the actual joining is very

24 The catalogue included a brief essay by art critic Xavier Sáenz de Gorbea who rightly sees in these works the influence of “turn-of-the-century modernist Vienna, according to the updated version of architect Hans Hollein.”
25 Regina Valenzuela’s report in the El País newspaper in 1992 has Anda saying: “it began to seem as if one needed a licence to make sculptures, so I decided I’d have a bit of fun.”
subtle. But the really amazing thing is the vertical back of one of the chairs, which rises up 180 centimetres to the limit from the floor. Although this vertical piece recalls the svelte backs of Mackintosh and Hoffmann and even the early Wright, the one who produced the Robie chair, it is in fact moulded as a vaulted niche of the kind that gave character and atmosphere to major parts of the city of Rome with their drilled marble plinths used as seats, typical of Italian rationalist architecture of the 1930s, and which, as I have repeatedly stressed, the sculptor discovered during his time in the city. The top part of the back, interpreted by some as erotic in intention, is produced by the opening of the rounded form of the seat.

Also included in this first exhibition of furniture-sculptures were two table-sculptures, Sangusai mahaia and Islamahaia, apparently simple but in fact executed with enormous skill and a great deal of "subterranean work." The tables consist of two large, robust coated oak table tops with major projections measuring 250 by 100 centimetres and 230 by 85 centimetres respectively, the former resting on two legs, the latter on three. Horizontally, the table sections show up as a sort of poetic print or trace, yin and yang on the surface. Some 75 centimetres high, the tables have all the features required to make them perfectly functional.

Another exceptional, highly impressive work included in the exhibition was a low three-legged table 28 centimetres high made from a single oak tree with an oval surface measuring 131 by 76 centimetres. Three different elephantine legs from the same trunk make a single organic whole that recalls sculptures by Japanese artist and sculptor Isamu Noguchi, bringing to mind his famous saying: "Sculpture is the definition of form in space. Visible to the spectator who moves as a participant. Sculptures move because we do."28

The other two works, sideboards or boxes in a combination of oak and boxwood are, shall we say, less structural, leaning more toward the folie. They coincide with the formal world and attitude of the extraordinary and much-misunderstood Italian architect Carlo Scarpa29, an architect who believed in what he did, who believed in images, in the multiplicity of events, who rejected the sanitized world in which we live, all hygiene and no images. I tend to think it's no coincidence that Anda and Scarpa share an interest in Hoffmann, a pre-Rationalist Viennese architect and designer. Like Anda with these exquisitely anomalous pieces where an enormous box, rather than resting on legs, actually hangs from a structure containing other boxes and where the boxwood decoration is incrustated not as a mask but as a stimulus for people to think and do, the Rationalists wanted to ensure no-one was left indifferent by their experience. There's nothing automatic or typological either about the triangular bar piece, about the legs or about the faces that make this a piece of pure play, a pure formal, solipsistic entertainment of the sculptor that also works as small drinks cabinet.

Variations

A number of works were in progress in 1988. We need to remember that material treatments for wood sculptures last several months, sometimes a year, before the piece can be definitively modelled. Anda was hit by a car in January 1989, an accident that left him an invalid for a long time (nearly five years and four operations). However, the remarkable cooperation of a number of assistants, the two Zelaia brothers, his two brothers and his sister Mari Tere—a highly intelligent, and quite indispensable collaborator in all senses of the word—meant that Anda's workshop-studio continued working on the pieces already begun. Despite the accident, the exhibitions continued, most of them outstanding, and not solely because of the number of sculptures involved. Exhibitions included the one at the Museum of Navarra (1990) and three at private galleries, one in Madrid (1991), another in Barcelona (1992) and the third in San Sebastián (1992).

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28 Isamu Noguchi, Catalogue of the exhibition held in Madrid-Barcelona with the cooperation of the Juan March Foundation and the Caixa de Catalunya Foundation, 1994, p.48.
29 Anda still has the 1984 Carlo Scarpa poster published for an exhibition at the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, on his workshop wall.
30 In one of Carlo Scarpa's relatively few published texts, "Può l'architettura essere poesia?", a conference given at the Vienna Fine Arts Academy on 16 November 1976, the architect says: "I am greatly moved: out of a sort of natural geographic affinity, my studies have led me to be closer to the modernity from Vienna, with the glorious names you are all familiar with. Naturally, the artist I most admired, the one who taught me the most, was the one who had most chance of being published in German journals (I remember "Moderne Bauformen" and "Wasnutsh Monatsshefte"), Josef Hoffmann. In Hoffmann there is a profound expression of the sense of decor on that made the students used to the Academy of Fine Arts think, as Ruskin said, that "architecture is decoration." The reason for this is simple: at heart, I am a Byzantine and Hoffmann, at bottom, has something of that oriental touch of the Europe that faces east. Anyone who is familiar with the expressive forms of this architect's art, is surely bound to agree with what I say." Francesco Dal Co Giuseppe Mazzariol, Carlo Scarpa 1906-1978, Electa, Milan, 1984, p.283
One set of sculptures, variations on table-sculptures and chair-sculptures, took the furniture-sculptures of 1987 to their limit. Outstanding amongst the chairs were the Aitaren Amaren Aulkia (1988-1991), with backs measuring 230 centimetres. Amongst the tables, many of them named after the place where the tree had grown that provided the material for the piece, almost always oak, is a very low one called Nabarzabal Mahaia (1987-1990) with three elephantine legs from an oak, the biggest tree Anda has ever worked with. Measuring 43 by 200 by 128 centimetres, this is one of the most memorable of all the sculptor’s works. New ideas are to be found in the anomalous but functional oak-and-boxwood Cama (Bed, 1988-1991) measuring 93 by 202 by 190 centimetres, where the form of the bed’s components quite explosively link black, Egyptian and Viking art with the most exquisite, sophisticated forms of Viennese art. We are, once again, back to Hans Hollein and Carlo Scarpa. This is a work that hints at a range of interpretations, associating life and death, suggesting transport to another life and so on. Also from these years is the coated oak armchair-sculpture Bakaikoa Aulkia I (1990-1991) another stunningly elegant masterwork with linked back and arms separate from the seat and where the form and dimensions of each element relate it to the finest works of 20th century Danish furniture art in wood such as The Chair (1949) and 45 Chair (1945), the former by Hans J. Wegner and the latter by Finn Juhl, both architects by profession. Other productions from this time include variations on the table-sculpture Kaska Barra (1986-1991) and the Eastern-flavoured Islam Mahaia II measuring 238 by 85 by 74 centimetres and both in oak where the relation between vertical and horizontal elements, forms, stability and construction in space provide the formal basis for their subsequent use. Finally in this series we need to mention Sangusai Mahaia (1990-1991) with a coated oak table top measuring 260 by 88 centimetres and a leaf on a highly arresting leg. This is a surprising and certainly the most recherché and sophisticated in extremis variation on an idea—a table without legs—that has long fascinated the sculptor.

Also from those years are four or five not particularly large works with a definite Japanese feel to them: boxes and tables that hide stories, treasures and surprises. As opposed to contemporary seriousness, impatience, convulsion or just plain unease these pieces that contain other pieces are works for hope and tranquillity. Although they open up, they do not do so with a mechanical or automatic movement; other works come out of them, rather like a Russian doll. Each piece is a project. They are virtuoso floor-based sculptural works of an extreme sensuality, executed in coated oak and walnut and boxwood, with hollows, secrets and compartmentalized spaces where memory, love and silences are kept. Some have amusing or ironic titles such as their addressee Oteizari (Küta Mecafisica) (1990-1991), others have poetic titles such as Romeo and Juliet (1987-1990), and some titles are rather more evocative, such as Cajón de los recuerdos (1987-1990) (The drawer of memories) and even popular ones, like Gambela (1987-1990). The scale of the last one recalls some of the work produced by US sculptor Joel Shapiro.

Also from around this time is a most untypical, almost strange sculpture (in comparison with the rest of Anda’s oeuvre) entitled A la desobediencia (To disobedience, 1987-1990), which has not been continued or developed in other, later works. Comprising three independent, autonomous pieces linked by laser, each part is a pure geometric form, a sphere, a triangular prism containing a tetrahedron and a semi-cylinder, all of them forms favoured by the sculptor. The work itself recalls the forms of the revolutionary Enlightenment architects Boullée, Ledoux, and Lequeu, all of whom loomed large in Italian architectural culture at the time (and, it should be said, in culture tout court) and which Anda has always been alive to. Lasers were a regular feature of the art of the time and it is possible that Anda was fascinated by the idea of using one, particularly after seeing lasers in Venice at the Biennale, which he attended regularly.

Some years later, in 1995, Anda exhibited a set of works in a private gallery in Pamplona. Some were 31 Galeria Miguel Marcos
32 Galeria Gaspar
33 Galeria Dieciséis
34 The links with black and Viking art in Anda’s art from around this time are also appreciable in the large 240 by 48 by 19 centimetre sculptural piece Xuxeko Gaitu in coated oak and acacia.
35 Exhibited in Barcelona at the Galeria Gaspar in 1992 and acquired by the “Caixa de Pensions” savings bank.
36 Jorge Oteiza