

## Lapidarium Rome

15 September 2016 - 19 March 2017



Detail of Lapidarium, 2016, Courtesy of the artist, image Mario Basilio

**Lapidarium is a monumental sculptural work by Mexican artist, Gustavo Aceves which will be installed at important historical sites throughout Rome from 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016, including The Colosseum, Trajan's Market, The Imperial Fora and the Arch of Constantine.**

Comprised of 43 individual sculptures, ranging from 3 to 8 metres in height and with some works up to 12 metres in length, Lapidarium is an evolving work of incredible scale and ambition; a work in progress which will grow with each installation during its world tour until its final exhibition that will present a total of 100 works. Since 2014 when it was first previewed in Pietrasanta, to its official premiere at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin in 2015, a vast audience has already encountered this remarkable work.

*Lapidarium* is Aceves' attempt to create a dynamic and powerful response to one of the most pressing and divisive issues of our times - the migration crisis. The artist achieves this whilst forcefully portraying that this is a catastrophe with a long historical context, with each sculpture in Lapidarium representing a moment in time from the ancient history of diaspora.

The curator of Lapidarium, Dr Francesco Buranelli commented,  
*“One of the aims of Lapidarium is to throw a spotlight on the suffering of the many millions of people living with the unspeakable hardship of diaspora, constantly moving in order to survive. In so doing, Aceves also invites us to look at our own difficult history in the West - and acknowledge that in part, our wealth and cultural achievements are derived from the exploitation of others. Lapidarium is a monument to the “losers” in that history; a space to reflect on what we have already taken from those that now seek our help and a reminder not to repeat the horrors committed in the past.”*

Created over the last 6 years in Pietrasanta, with its renowned bronze foundries and marble, Lapidarium features a veritable ‘army’ of horses sculpted in bronze, marble, wood, iron and granite. The horse has been a potent symbol of freedom and strength for millennia, from the cave paintings of Lascaux to the most obvious inspiration for Lapidarium, the Quadriga of St. Mark’s in Venice. There is nothing victorious about Aceves’ powerfully rendered horses however: the boats in which they travel call to mind the journey of Charon across the river Styx to Hades, whilst the hollowed out forms of some of these vast horses contain human skulls, suggesting a version of Troy in which only death and suffering are smuggled ashore.

Lapidarium is a monument to the unsettled times we live in and a reminder that movement and diaspora is a history we all share, from the migration of the first people from Africa to populate Europe, to the forced migration caused by wars and religious intolerance. This endless diaspora has been played out with brutal ferocity to countless peoples, including the Jews, Armenians and Kurds in recent history, whilst the Mediterranean has become a graveyard to thousands of migrants fleeing civil war and persecution from countries in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Whilst many in Europe look on with fear to the influx of migrants, with the seeming conflict of interests and clash of cultures which ensues, we all stand to lose something valuable. By regarding others as barbarians and forgetting our shared humanity, we descend ourselves into barbarism. With its massive scale and powerful form a visible confrontation to indifference, Lapidarium asks us to examine our collective consciences and the values on which our notion of civilization is founded, whilst sounding a clear warning of the outcome if we do not.

***Regarding the barbarians, it is not necessary to wait for them; they always have been between us.*** Hans Magnus Enzensberger

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## NOTES TO EDITORS:

**Gustavo Aceves** (b. 1957, Mexico City) currently lives and works in Pietrasanta, Italy. Aceves is known throughout Latin America for his powerful paintings of the human figure which draw on classical pictorial traditions whilst using the monumental scale and strong colours common to Mexican murals. His work has been exhibited around the world since the late 1970s including the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, the Venice Biennale and the Beijing Biennale and is held in major private and permanent collections including Museo Memoria y Tolerancia, Mexico City and the Vatican Museum, Rome. He was one of the youngest artists in Christie's and Sotheby's new Latin American sales in New York in the early 1990s

### Lapidarium

Lapidarium is a gradually evolving work by Gustavo Aceves which will be installed at major city centres in an ambitious world tour, concluding with Mexico City in 2018. The city locations selected for this tour are in part inspired by the historic journey of the St Mark's Quadriga.

Lapidarium - *Waiting for the Barbarians* in Rome is curated by Francesco Buranelli, former Director of the Vatican Museums, and is realised with the support of The Mexican Embassy of Rome, the archaeological area of Rome and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage of Rome. The presentation in Rome will be accompanied by the publication of a book about Lapidarium with essays by Francesco Buranelli.

The presentation in Rome is the second installation of a worldwide tour for Lapidarium which began in 2014 with a preview of the work, Lapidarium - *Work in Progress* installed throughout the town of Pietrasanta, including Michelangelo's famous bell tower in the church of Saint Augustin. *Work in Progress* concluded with a live performance in which one monumental sculpted horse was born up from the sea and 25 were installed alongside the jetty of Tonfano Marina, Pietrasanta.

In 2015, the first official presentation of the tour, Lapidarium - *To Pass Boundaries* was unveiled at the Brandenburg Gate as part of the *Spring in Berlin* commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II. Placed in the shadow of the Quadriga of Victoria, the 21 scarred and fragmented horses formed a sharp contrast to Gottfried's triumphal figures and stood as a stark reminder of the horrors of WWII - and future wars.

Subsequent city venues will include Athens, Istanbul, Paris and Venice, the tour will conclude with an installation of Lapidarium comprised of 100 works in Mexico City.