

## **Aspects of Anthropological Semiotics in the Vision Created by Aurelio Teno Teno**

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The IAFOR International Conference on Arts & Humanities in Hawaii 2026  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

In this paper, we aim to illustrate an anthropological view of the work of the Spanish sculptor and painter Aurelio Teno Teno. His art reveals the preoccupation with the figure of the Knight Errant, a defining Cervantes (1955) character for Spanish literature. Don Quixote de la Mancha, a dreamer, is also called the Knight of the Sad Figure. Teno's artistic genius was manifested through overwhelming creations as a force of plastic expression. These impress with the finesse and refinement of the image, with the power of suggestion that perfectly defines the characteristics of this charismatic character and the ingenuity of the use of materials, texture, and colours that contextualize precisely the character. The Exposition at the Convention Center of Córdoba 2023 is an homage to this remarkable contemporary artist, who achieved international recognition during his lifetime (Teno, 2023). Through the analysis of some exhibited works, we have highlighted that the experimentation of art becomes an exercise of intuitive grammar in which perceptual automatisms are reorganized into cultural patterns that reflect the human need for self-realization and transcendence. From a neuroaesthetic perspective, rationally modulated feeling transforms the self, which then transcends artistic creations, inviting the viewer to co-create meaning, depending on the personal cognitive, emotional, and cultural background. Notably, the curatorial concept integrates traditional decorative motifs to evoke Spain's historical and cultural identity, creating an immersive and reflective experience for the viewer. The imaging tautology is contextualized differently to highlight each work.

*Keywords:* Aurelio Teno Teno, anthropological semiotics, artistic creativity, *Don Quixote*, curatorial vision, imaging tautology, different contextualization

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## Introduction

### **Horizon of Anthropological Semiotics and Neuroaesthetics: Materiality, Cultural Memory, and the Quixotic Archetype in Aurelio Teno Teno**

In the horizon of anthropological semiotics, the work of art appears as a structure of signs that exerts its efficacy through explicit discourse, and also through a nonverbal syntax of form, matter, and spatial relations. The viewer enters into a semiosis in which he does not mechanically decode, but actualizes information in a network of culturally mediated meanings. In this sense, art becomes an instance of the grammaticalization of experience, a language of the visible that functions through implicit rules, comparable to a syntax of visual design (Kress & Leeuwen, 2021), but also with a rhetoric of the image in which the iconic sign, chromaticism, and composition produce connotative effects (Barthes, 1964). In the same vein, treatises on visual semiotics insist that the image transmits information, and also establishes a true rhetoric of the perceptible, in which plastic procedures are equivalent to figures of speech (Groupe  $\mu$ , 1992).

This framework can be refined by specific references to aesthetics as an experience, often intensely reflexive, which involves a form of knowledge situated between affect and judgment (Schaeffer, 2015). Moreover, such an experience reinstates the viewer as an interpretive agent, not as a passive receiver, thus conceptually legitimizing the formula of co-production of meaning (Rancière, 2009): the work offers a matrix of signs, and the viewer dynamizes it according to their hermeneutic skills and their cultural habitus.

In this interdisciplinary framework, the work of Aurelio Teno Teno becomes the architecture for observing how a cultural matrix is translated plastically, without being illustrated literally. The recurrence of the figure of Don Quixote does not function in Teno's art as a simple iconographic motif, but as a significant nucleus with an anthropological function, an archetype of the tension between ideal and real, between ethical aspiration and resilience. The meaning is produced through an orchestration of dramatic forms, compositional instabilities, and material contrasts.

On the other hand, the analysis cannot ignore the fact that meaning is also produced through the curatorial act. In the tradition of exhibition space criticism, the *White Cube* model has been described as an ideology of neutrality that masks its own conditioning (O'Doherty, 1986). In the case of the exhibition at the *Palacio de Congresos de Córdoba 2023*, the exhibition frame does not claim the neutrality of the white cube, but it operates with a visible strategy, an expressive exhibition configuration, and a dramaturgy of recurrence, in which the pole of impact of the exhibition itinerary functions as the semantic centre (Puerto Fernández et al., 2023). This curatorial option can be conceptualized as a technology of semiosis, where the space becomes an operator of meaning, and the succession of works establishes a logic core, re-functionalized in different contexts, producing not redundancy but intensification. The viewer is invited to compare, distinguish, and detect subtle differences among recontextualizations; visual tautology becomes a method of interpretive densification, creating rhythm and tension along the expositional itinerary. In a cultural-analytical reading, this recurrence can also be understood as a strategy for establishing a regime of visibility in which the work is a node in a network of relationships (Mitchell, 1984). Thus, the curatorial act becomes an infrastructure of participation, distributing the attention, creating intervals of reflection, and expanding the pathways into meaning (Bishop, 2012; Rancière, 2009).

## Objectives, Research Questions, Analytical Hypothesis of the Study, and Article Structure

From the perspective of the research gap, the reception of Teno's work is often treated either through biographical descriptivism or through thematic generalities about Don Quixote, without a methodical correlation among three levels that, here, condition each other: (1) the work as a cultural system of signs (anthropological semiotics, and visual semiotics), (2) reception as an embodied and affective experience (neuroesthetics, aesthetic empathy), (3) exhibition as a mechanism of signification (curatorial device; tacit critique of White Cube). In addition, the materials and techniques (metal, wood, stone), and techniques (mixed processes) are frequently praised for their virtuosity but rarely treated as signifying materiality, that is, as a medium in which meaning is incorporated and transmitted. Precisely this materiality, with its cultural memory, constitutes one of the keys to interpretation through which Teno's work produces its intensity.

The research questions derive organically:

- (RQ1) In what way does the quixotic figure activate the Spanish cultural matrix and convert it into a visual ethics?
- (RQ2) How does the signifying materiality function as a semiotic operator of dramatism and transcendence?
- (RQ3) How does the curatorial device intensify semiosis through spatial, expressive configuration, and visual tautology?
- (RQ4) What does neuroaesthetics explain about the way in which this experience mobilizes emotion, memory, and self-reflection (Chatterjee, 2014; Freedberg & Gallese, 2007)?

This study emphasizes that in the work of Teno, meaning emerges through co-production among three interdependent levels: (1) artistic creation viewed from anthropological and visual semiotic perspectives as a cultural system of signs, (2) the reception of the artwork as an embodied and affective experience, in anthropological (meaning as a product of culture and society), phenomenological (meaning as a product of lived experience and perception), and neuroaesthetic (meaning as a product of reception and preference processes) visions, (3) the interpretation of the artwork as a mechanism of signification from the perspective of several reading keys present in the curatorial structuring of the exhibition under study: spatial and expressive configuration, visual tautology, and tacit criticism of the White Cube.

The article's contribution is structured into three levels: methodological (consists in a coherent triangulation among the semiotic tradition, the theory of the image, and neuroaesthetics), analytical (re-centers materiality as a semiotic operator), and hermeneutic (treats the exhibition as a semiotic device, in which the spatial configuration and visual tautology reveal the artwork's cultural function in public space).

The article map follows a deductive-analytical demarch. The first section delimits the theoretical framework: anthropological semiotics and visual semiotics (Barthes, 1964; Groupe  $\mu$ , 1992; Kress & Leeuwen, 2021), complemented by references from neuroaesthetics (Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2014; Freedberg & Gallese, 2007; Zeki, 1999), and image theory (Belting, 2001; Bredekamp, 2010). The second section contextualizes the corpus and justifies the selection of works, with a focus on the quixotic core and the Córdoba 2023 exhibition (Puerto Fernández et al., 2023). The third section examines: (1) the network of signs and cultural values associated with Don Quixote; (2) signifying materiality as a semiotic operator; (3) the curatorial act, with a focus on the spatial and expressive exhibition configuration, visual

tautology, and distancing from the White Cube model (O'Doherty, 1986). Finally, the fourth section integrates the results and proposes transferable methodological implications for the analysis of contemporary art, in which meaning is constituted at the intersection of sign, work art, and the institution of exhibition.

### **Philosophical and Neuroaesthetic Anthropological Perspectives on Art**

In the domain of anthropological semiotics, art functions as a potent system of nonverbal communication, deeply connected with a society's cultural matrix. When an individual interacts with a work of art, he is engaging in an aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience becomes a semiotic act in which the sign serves as an indestructible bond between signifier and signified, transforming intuitive perception into a subjective understanding of meaning. This process reinforces cultural identity by translating abstract societal values into tangible forms, making art a fundamental mechanism for transmitting and negotiating cultural knowledge across generations. Through art, the artist offers a deeper sense of existence, catalysing emotional responses, and existential and intellectual reflection. This experience aligns with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, particularly the higher levels: self-actualization and, ultimately, transcendence (Maslow, 1971).

Bundgaard (2009) enriches this idea by framing art as a grammar of intuition, where perceptual automatisms are disrupted and reorganized into a higher order of knowledge through aesthetics. This shift reflects Dewey's (1934) concept of art as experience, in which perception is dynamic, shaped by experiential rhythms and tensions. Thus, when the viewer interacts with an artwork, he decodes visual signs, and intuits connotative meanings layered into denotative forms. Artistic perception becomes semiosis, enabling intuitive and affective cognition to work in tandem.

Furthermore, the transformation that occurs through artistic creation or reception reflects what Merleau-Ponty (1962) calls a blurring of the boundaries between body and world, between the physical self and the existential continuum. When one is immersed in an artistic act, one becomes a psychological metonymy (Díaz-Cantelar García-Junco, 2022; Diederichsen, 2008), which signifies that the emotional and symbolic content of the work of art becomes integrated into the structure of the self. This process can be likened to the *aesthetic internalization of meaning*, in which, by interacting with art, we change our perception and, implicitly, the way we exist in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). If for Freud (1957), artistic immersion leads affect towards *Verschiebung* and the fixation of an acceptable substitute, because psychic material is linked to representations and objects (including in processes such as sublimation, symbolization, etc.), for Lacan (2006), a conscious mind captivated by an artistic act becomes embodied meaning, the emotional and symbolic charge of the work integrated into the structure of the self.

Historically, aesthetic experience has always been considered intellectually demanding. According to Hume (1757), the *standard of taste* emerges from those who, through experience and reflection, cultivate their perception beyond that of the casual observer. Aesthetic feeling is instinctive, and rationally modulated (Shelley, 2017). This idea resonates with Goodman's (1976) theory of the languages of art. The symbolic forms used in artworks function much like natural languages, with syntax, semantics, and contextual meaning. Understanding these languages requires a cultivated interpretive framework, much as training in a spoken language does. This cognitive-linguistic approach further suggests that art is perceived and experienced, and also thought about and decoded.

In recent years, neuroaesthetics (Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2016) has begun to explore how the brain responds to art, emphasizing the interplay among art, emotion, memory, perception, and thinking. These studies suggest that aesthetic intuition is a neurological correlate. The brain's implicit neural connection (often associated with self-referential thinking) is particularly active during deep artistic engagement, further reinforcing the idea that the aesthetic act transforms the self. As Bourriaud (1998) argues, contemporary art frequently centers on collective environments and experiences rather than on immobile artifacts. In this context, aesthetics becomes relational and participatory, inviting the receiver to contemplate, and to co-create meaning.

### The Philosophy That Guides the Artist in Creating His Work, and Elements of Artistic Analysis From Anthropological Perspectives

A synthetic analysis of Teno's work from multiple perspectives led me to the creation of the following diagram.

**Figure 1**  
Structure of the Analyses of the Aesthetic Experience (Author: G. Havârneanu, 2026)



The diagram demonstrates its analytical utility through its structure, which functions as an operationalization of concepts. *Anthropological Semiotics & Culture* addresses cultural

identity and the transmission of knowledge, which aligns directly with image semiotics and the rhetoric of the visual (Barthes, 1964; Groupe  $\mu$ , 1992). In Teno's artworks, this is embodied in the recurrence of *Don Quixote* as a reactualized cultural memory. *Neuroaesthetics & Modernity* structures the notion of *relational art* (Bourriaud, 1998) that aims to blur the artist/viewer boundaries by describing the participatory regime of meaning in direct neurocognitive correlation with aesthetic intuition, by activating networks of self-reflection, prediction, emotion–meaning integration that produce effects of internalization and transformation of perceived meaning (Chatterjee, 2014; Zeki, 1999). *Cognition & Cultivated Judgment* states that the ideas about languages of art (Goodman, 1976) and *standards of taste* (Hume, 1757) substantiate the claim that understanding Teno's work requires an educated hermeneutics; art as a field of thought becomes an argument against based impression readings, in which meaning begins with the viewer's vision at the moment, marked by sensitivity to the immediate effect constructed by tone, rhythm, atmosphere, tension, and affective colour. *Transformation of the Self/Embodiment* through the *blurring of boundaries* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964) and the *aesthetic internalization of meaning are corroborated by aesthetic empathy* (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007) and *psychological metonymy* (Díaz-Cantelar García-Junco, 2022; Diederichsen, 2008), which explain the translation of the reception of art work into experience and the reconfiguration of the self in the context of the perception of the Teno artistic work. *Dynamic Perception & Intuition as a grammar of intuition* (Bundgaard, 2009) and art as experience (Dewey, 1934) describe the mechanism by which the work disrupts automatisms, and favours the intuition of connotations; at Teno, this is supported by materiality and formal tensions. *Existential & Emotional Reflection* subscribes to the idea that access to a deep meaning of existence and alignment with *self-actualization/transcendence* (Maslow, 1943, 1971) explains why the Don Quixote figure functions as an ethical and existential axis, rather than merely a theme in Teno's work.

In terms of aesthetic pragmatism, experience is not a simple succession of impressions, but a way of articulating existence that reestablishes the connection between the sensible and the intelligible, between affect and judgment (Dewey, 1934). Contemporary neuroaesthetics corroborates the thesis that artistic experience mobilizes a complex neurocognitive network that integrates emotion, attention, memory, and self-reflection, which explains why aesthetics can have transformative effects on the self (Chatterjee, 2014; Zeki, 1999). Applied to the work of Teno, especially to the Don Quixotic nucleus and the Córdoba 2023 exhibition, the diagram becomes a reading tool that maps how meaning is constituted at the intersection of the cultural matrix, the signifying materiality, the expressive reception, and the institution of exhibition (O'Doherty, 1986; Puerto Fernández et al., 2023).

### Research Design

The study adopts a *qualitative-interpretive case study design*, centred on the work of Teno and the exhibition at the *Palacio de Congresos de Córdoba* (Teno, 2023), understood together as a semiotic field in which artistic creation, the spectator personality, and the institution of exhibition co-produce meaning.

The nature of the problem justifies the option for such a design, as long as the study does not aim to measure an isolated effect, but to describe and explain how emergent meaning is constituted at the intersection of sign, materiality, experience received, and curatorial conception (Barthes, 1964; Groupe  $\mu$ , 1992; O'Doherty, 1986). Deliberately, the methodological framework is built through *theoretical-analytical triangulation*: (1) the reading of work as a cultural system of signs from an anthropological semiotics and visual semiotics

point of view (Barthes, 1964; Groupe  $\mu$ , 1992; Kress & Leeuwen, 2021), (2) artistic experience reception, modelling and interpretation from phenomenological and neuroaesthetic perspectives (Chatterjee, 2014; Freedberg & Gallese, 2007; Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964; Zeki, 1999), (3) the study over the curatorial architecture for from the perspective of the exhibition space as a mechanism for signifying the artistic work (Bennett, 1996; Bishop, 2012; O'Doherty, 1986; Rancière, 2009).

The study corpus is constituted by intentional selection of a set of works (sculptures and paintings) centred on the Don Quixotic archetype, analysed in relation to the architecture and scenography of the Córdoba 2023 exhibition (Teno, 2023). The *inclusion criteria* are: (1) core of Spanish and universal cultural memory; (2) relevance for the analysis of significant materiality; (3) curatorial relevance, through the positioning of the works in the spatial configuration and in series of recurrence that produce visual tautology as hermeneutic densification (O'Doherty, 1986; Puerto Fernández et al., 2023). Along with the selected works, a secondary unit of analysis is constituted by the curatorial space (rhythm of recurrences, work-architecture relationship, traditional decorative elements), since this is treated as an infrastructure of semiosis and interpretative participation (Bennett, 1996).

The *data sources are triangulated in three registers*: (1) primary visual data which are direct observation and photographic documentation of the works in the exhibition context, with systematic description of volume, texture, chromaticity, formal tensions, and spatial relationships, relevant for semiotic reading, (2) curatorial and institutional data of the exhibition, including the catalogue, helps reconstruct the curatorial intention (Puerto Fernández et al., 2023), (3) theoretical and contextual-interpretive data include literature on visual semiotics, neuroaesthetics, anthropology, phenomenology, and curatorial studies (Bredenkamp, 2018; Chatterjee, 2014; Freedberg & Gallese, 2007; Kress & Leeuwen, 2021).

The analytical procedure follows *three interrelated steps*, as outlined in the article's hypothesis: (1) denotative-connotative semiotic reading involved the description of the visible elements, and the cultural connotations, values, and mythologies activated by the quixotic figure were reconstructed, in line with the rhetoric of the image and visual semiotics (Barthes, 1964; Groupe  $\mu$ , 1992), (2) the analysis of the materiality articulated with the theory of the image as an agent of the impact signified by the materials and techniques used, has been interpreted as signs of artistic inference that produce semantic and affective effects (Belting, 2001; Bredenkamp, 2010), (3) modelling of the reception process was perceived as an internalized thought about the somatic and affective experience, in which the phenomenology supports the blurring of body-world boundaries, and neuroaesthetics explains the integration between emotion, memory, and self-reflection (Chatterjee, 2014; Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964; Zeki, 1999).

*Interpretive rigor* is ensured by: (1) triangulation of sources (art works, catalogue, space, theory), (2) thick description of signs, symbols, and materials, so that they can be followed critically, (3) comparison between the works in the context of exhibition to avoid rapid generalizations which minimizes the researcher's reflexivity (Rancière, 2009).

## Results

The core philosophy of Teno's art focuses on using tangible materials as a refined system of nonverbal communication to convey fundamental Spanish cultural stories and evoke existential reflection. From an anthropological and semiotic viewpoint, his work involves viewers in an

active aesthetic experience in which they interpret culturally influenced signs. Teno's artworks encourage phenomenological engagement that extends beyond passive observation. By physically interacting with the varied and distinctive forms and textures, viewers internalize the symbolic meaning of the work, the struggle, the idealism, which neuroaesthetic studies suggest activates brain systems linked to emotion and self-reflection.

Don Quixote is a recurring motif in Spanish art, depicted by Aurelio Teno Teno and Ricardo Balaca in their interpretations of the Knight of the Sad Figure riding the Clavileño horse.

### Figure 2

*Ricardo Balaca, Don Quixote and Sancho Fly Using the Fireworks Within the Clavileño, 19th Century, Spain*



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clavile%C3%B1o>

Balaca's 19<sup>th</sup> century version adopts an impressionistic style, emphasizing the fleeting impressions of the flight scene with vibrant colours and delicate brushstrokes. The characters are animated: Don Quixote is excited by the fireworks, Sancho Panza is horrified by their situation, and spectators react to this madness. The image features an artificial blur that transforms the wooden horse into a fantastical Pegasus.

### Figure 3

*Aurelio Teno Teno. Aurelio Teno's Catalogue Requiem for Clavileño 1978, Sculptures of Quixote in the World (Teno, 1978)*



Source: <https://en.todocoleccion.net/art-catalogs/catalogo-aurelio-teno-requiem-por-clavileno-1978-esculpturas-quijote-mundo~x257524170>

In contrast, Aurelio Teno Teno's interpretation leans toward a neo-expressionist, poetic style, portraying the flight metaphor with nearly realistic elements. His work depicts the characters and horse explicitly, infused with emotional depth. The Knight is likened to Icarus, and the horse to Pegasus, leaving the placement of painted wings ambiguous. Teno captures a comic yet intense essence in Sancho Panza's disorientation, while highlighting the ecstatic nature of Don Quixote and the expansive character of Clavileño through vivid colours and precise details, showcasing a blend of humour, and heartfelt subjectivity. Don Quixote, the Cervantesian character, is one of the central motifs of Teno's works in sculpture and painting. The artist especially considers Quixote's innocence. The painter said: *My work conveys a rebellious Don Quixote who is fighting in favour of justice and peace* (Cubeiro, 2005). Codrescu (2018) compares the madness of Don Quixote, who embodies *the constitutional activism of the Western spirit*, with the antagonistic one, that of Prince Mishkin from Dostoevsky's (1869) novel *The Idiot*, which illustrates *the traditional contemplativeism of the Eastern world, without a horse and without weapons, resigned and confident in the prospect of eternity*.

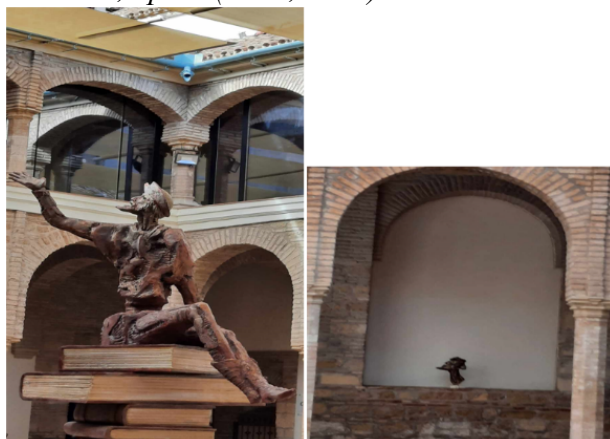
### **Aurelio Teno Teno Exhibition at the Palace of Congress and Exhibitions, November 2023, Córdoba, Spain**

The enduring artistic legacy of Teno ensures his work remains the subject of both seasonal and permanent exhibitions, celebrating his versatility as a jeweller, sculptor, and painter. A significant recent exhibition held at the Palacio de Congresos in November 2023 (Teno, 2023) is comprehensively documented in the campaign publication: *Teno: Catálogo de la obra artística de Teno en el Palacio de Congresos de Córdoba* (Teno, 2023). This authoritative catalog is a collaborative effort by key figures involved in preserving and promoting his heritage. The authors include María Isabel Puerto Fernández, an accomplished researcher and artist specializing in art history; Mónica Teno Rodríguez, the sculptor's daughter; and Juan Salado Soto, recognized for his strategic contributions to the local arts scene as a partner in the Córdoba Ambassadors program.

The cultural programming of the old Hospital de San Sebastián, the Palacio de Congresos de Córdoba, inaugurated in 2023, includes an important exhibition dedicated to the recognition of the Cordoban sculptor Aurelio Teno Teno (Teno, 2023). The exhibition brings together more than a hundred works, sculptures, and paintings, organized thematically. The special thing about this exhibition lies in its curatorial approach, which has conceived a expressive, tautological exhibition configuration, carefully adapted to the pre-existing architectural space and deliberately departing from the conventional *White Cube* model (D'Oherly, 1986). At the centre of this special strategy is a monumental sculpture of the Walking Knight, identified by the barber's basin used as a helmet and the stack of cavalry novels, symbols of the readings that transformed Hidalgo into an incurable dreamer and a firm defender of justice. The curatorial vision enriches the exhibition space with references to the Spanish historical tradition, guiding viewers into a spatio-temporal immersive experience.

**Figure 4**

*Aurelio Teno Teno Exhibition at the Palace of Congress and Exhibitions, November 2023, Córdoba, Spain (Teno, 2023)*



Through visual tautology, the curator builds a cathartic environment that captivates the viewer, using recurring elements with common meanings but with different functions and contexts to generate dynamism and emphasize the distinctive artistic value of each artwork.

**Figure 5**

*Aurelio Teno Teno, The Eagle, Palace of Congress and Exhibitions, November 2023, Córdoba, Spain (Teno, 2023)*



Aurelio TenoTeno's sculptural jewel, *Eagle*, a dominant figure in Spanish history and heraldry (the Spanish Imperial Eagle), symbolizes national ideals of strength, vision, and resilience. By embedding symbolic elements (agate and silver), the piece reflects the theory of how the cultural matrix influences human personality (Yeh et al., 2022). Additionally, the Eagle supports Garcês et al.' (2016) theory on the impact of creative environments, as the sculptural jewel emerged from a specific artistic ecosystem.

In sum, the Eagle is an object of visual and tactile appeal, and also a neuroaesthetic artifact of the artist's cultural imprint and the environmental factors that shape creative cognition.

**Figure 6**

*Aurelio Teno Teno, Don Quixote on Horse-Sculpture, Palace of Congress and Exhibitions, November 2023, Córdoba, Spain (Teno, 2023)*



The sculpture *Don Quixote on Horseback* evokes the monumental allure of Rome's Trevi Fountain, recalling Neptune's dramatic emergence from the sea. Similarly, the Dreamer-Adventurer appears caught in a visionary struggle, riding a magical, spirited horse, as both figure and symbolic animal embody an unending pleading for chivalric ideals. The interplay of pedestal, gypsum, and gleaming bronze creates a striking contrast of textures, light, and form, reinforcing the work's emotional intensity. Don Quixote's ecstatic posture captures the essence of the character, while the two white gypsum forms behind him, suggestive of the sun and the moon, symbolize the eternal quest for idealized love.

**Figure 7**

*Aurelio Teno Teno, Quixote With the Wounded Hand, Palace of Congress and Exhibitions, November 2023, Córdoba, Spain (Teno, 2023)*



The sculpture *Quixote with the Winded Hand* suggests, on the one hand, a martyr (his facial grimace and contorted posture reveal that idea), but also a Don Quixote exalted by the new invention that will carry him like the thought and like the wind, to his lover, Dulcinea del Toboso. The combination of precious wood on the pedestal, leather, and metal on the sculpture contributes to the feeling of finesse and refinement. The instability of the structure is visually suggested by the allure of the knight who has decided to fight for justice, but is in an unbalanced position on his horse, which appears to have the wings of a flying machine with sails. In a broader context, the sculpture functions as a complex system of nonverbal communication,

inviting active interpretation of culturally embedded symbols and values. The sculpture engages viewers in a transformative aesthetic experience that is emotional, intellectual, and existential, aligning with theories that emphasize expressive perception and cultivated judgment. Supported by phenomenological and neuroaesthetic perspectives, the artwork dissolves the boundary between creator and viewer, turning aesthetic experience into a participatory, co-creative process.

### Figure 8

*Aurelio Teno Teno, Don Quixote, Palace of Congress and Exhibitions, November 2023, Córdoba, Spain (Teno, 2023)*



The theme is repeated in other omonime paintings, in which Don Quixote is full of vigour, enthusiasm, and dynamism. His suffering is betrayed by the contorted body posture and the disorder of the compositional elements, sometimes colourful and spontaneous, with an uncontrolled brush touch. The image lines are sharp and impetuous, describing the character in action. In the first painting, the colours are monotonous, earthy, and lacking in brightness. The three fragmentary zoomorphic symbols added suggest that the character's action is at the level of the dream, without contact with reality. In the second painting, the pure, bright colours accentuate the dynamism, and their segmentation into three areas: earth, passion, and love, accentuates the drama of the character.

### Figure 9

*Aurelio Teno Teno, Don Quixote, Palace of Congress and Exhibitions, November 2023, Córdoba, Spain (Teno, 2023)*



Aurelio Teno Teno's repeated focus on the sad knight-errant leverages art as a complex system of nonverbal communication embedded in the Spanish cultural context. These minimalist paintings use specific visual signs, such as the costume and the barber's bowl hat, to transmit shared knowledge and reinforce cultural identity. The consistent presence of sadness engages in an empathetic aesthetic experience and an intellectual effort for resilience engagement from the viewer. Teno employs a sophisticated symbolic language: monotonous colours and absent anatomical details to signify resignation in the first artwork, while a skeleton-like grimace against bright colours in the others creates semiotic tension. This intentional contrast forces viewers to actively construct meaning. This sorrow coding proposal through colour and form, aligns with phenomenological approaches, where expressive perception internalizes symbolic content, reshaping the individual's sense of self and way of being. Ultimately, Teno's painting functions as a transformative language that connects people to shared human experiences of melancholy and idealism.

### **Discussion of Research Questions**

(RQ1). In Aurelio Teno Teno art, Don Quixote functions as a significant nucleus and anthropological archetype, since it does not illustrate the Cervantesian narrative, but rather plastically re-semantises it, transferring the literary heritage into a visual register. Through a rhetoric of connotation (plastic procedures, compositional instabilities, tensional gestures), recognizable signs are converted into axiological vectors, such as justice, dignity, melancholy, and resilience (Barthes, 1964; Groupe  $\mu$ , 1992).

(RQ2). Materials (metal/wood/stone/mixed media) are treated as expressive signs (texture, reflexivity, and roughness) which produce semantics, and aesthetic effect. Phenomenology explains the internalization of meaning through engaged perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964), and neuroaesthetics, understood as aesthetic empathy, accounts for affective intensity through expressive resonance and the integration of emotion into interpretation (Chatterjee, 2014; Freedberg & Gallese, 2007; Zeki, 1999).

(RQ3). The spatial configuration establishes a semantic axis, and visual tautology densifies hermeneutics by forcing comparisons, refining connotative discrimination, and stabilizing meaning through recontextualization (Puerto Fernández et al., 2023). The exhibition produces a cultural regime of visibility and knowledge (Bennett, 1996), reactivating the viewer as an agent in the co-production of meaning (Rancière, 2009), and amplifying the participatory dimension of reception (Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 1998).

(RQ4). Neuroaesthetics explains the transformative nature of experience by noting that artistic reception integrates affective evaluation, memory, and self-referentiality. In Aurelio Teno Teno's art, the cultural-mnemonic trigger is Quixote, and the affective amplifier is dramatic materiality and tensional gestural; together, they facilitate aesthetic empathy and expressive (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

A coherent synthesis places Teno's art between tradition and modernity, between myth, history, and contemporary sensibility. Through an expressive, often dramatic plastic language, Teno transforms matter into a support for cultural memory and ethical reflection. His characters, especially the recurring figure of Don Quixote, are not simple representations of literary

characters, but archetypes of the human condition, defined by dream, sacrifice, the imbalance between ideal and reality, the struggle for justice and meaning.

His work functions as a complex symbolic system in which fragmented forms, structural tensions, and compositional instability serve as metaphors of modern existence. In Aurelio Teno Teno proposes a contemplative art, one that demands interpretative and affective involvement on the part of viewers, activating the phenomenological, anthropological, and existential dimensions of aesthetic experience. Thus, his art transcends the boundaries of the artistic object and constitutes a space of dialogue between past and present, between individual and community, between materiality and transcendence, confirming its lasting relevance in the landscape of Spanish and international contemporary art.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The author declares that Grammarly was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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