

Let's talk about painting, and what better place to do so than Cajastur's 51st Salón Internacional de Fotografía?

If we consult the encyclopaedia —there is no need to search the whole Net— it tells us that painting is the art of applying colour to a surface in order to create images. So far, so good. In the specific section on art and its classifications, it tells us that painting emerged in response to the human instinct to reproduce the forms of nature or interpret these intellectually by means of line and colour as essential elements. The effect of volume is a later pictorial element, achieved through the play of light and shade, giving a sense of corporeality, with the mechanisms of perspective serving to suggest the idea of depth. In fact we are not talking about techniques here, nor about supports and methods of fixing an image, but trying to situate ourselves in relation to attitudes, fundamentally vital attitudes of resistance, not too far removed from those of the 19th-century masters who, like Arancha Goyeneche, loaded up their stuff and went off to encounter the landscape, the light, the forms and nuances offered by everything around them and, liberated precisely by photography, went back to basic principles to give order to their impressions, impressions with a specific time and date, with nothing invented.

Landscapes found abounding in lustres and reflections, suggestions of landscapes and of moods that make us participants in their places and their walks, their love of painting, not without painting, but painting full of painting, of colours applied to a surface in order to create images.

Brushstrokes, thousands of brushstrokes, black, golden, blue on a background prepared in advance as a sequential, cinematic curtain, full of camera movements, albeit those of a static camera, with techniques of montage to highlight the narrative.

These same backgrounds have the capacity to abandon the support and take over the very walls themselves, landscape within landscape, cinema within cinema, turning themselves into sets in which to situate the action, a measured action, without stridency, slow panning shots on the passage of time, as on a perfect day, in three seasons and one day, plays of fantasy or beautiful illusions with the sea of tranquillity in the background; familiar, nearby spaces, telling stories for her loved ones, like a story for Lucía, her daughter.

Indeed, all of A.G.'s work is both private and open at the same time, full of connotations the artist herself, sincere and tranquil, methodical and patient, a lover of what is closest and of what she believes in; this is an oeuvre without duplicities, and although I don't know if it might not have a desire to conceal something, clearly this has nothing to do with her enthusiastic belief in what she does, and in what she lives.

At times we critics feel obliged to find hidden meanings, reflections on the unconscious that underlies the artist's work, ramifications and parallel or tangential lines of development: I suppose that is part of the job. It can also be the case that none of this is necessary, and that what we go to such tortuous lengths to track down is right beside us all along without our being aware of it, without our realizing it, that there is no double reading for a single text, and it seems to me that in A.G.'s work there is something of this.

A.G. is always sincere in conversation when speaking about what she does; with no need of elaborate discourses, she defends her proximity to the pictorial medium, her sensibility toward something that some have begun to lose and is now almost foreign to them. This posture is assumed from the very nature of the terrain in which she was formed and which she has not the slightest intention of giving up: for her, this attitude would amount to a deceit.

It really is quite magical to listen to her assert affirming her ways of working, of undertaking the realization of her series based on walks in the hills with people who in principle have nothing to do with the whole art swindle, people who come to these places with other aspirations, with other things in their heads and their hearts, with whom the experience is shared from points of view different from those of the creative artist, while concluding in the end that the sensations are the same, that the

aesthetic pleasure is of the same intensity, that all have found the same landscape and have an equal need to share it.

A.G. does not work on a plane of concealment resulting from the superposing of successively applied layers of colour, a veiling made impossible by the opacity of the materials; she does not attempt to construct enigmatic images that require the intellectual exercise of deciphering them: she is simply moved by the need to share her vision, her vital and comforting exploration of the bonds of friendship and all there is around her, and sets out to do so as well as she is able, from the gaze of painting, from painting.

There are no hidden messages: her images come from her daily labours, from simple starting points, from a position almost diametrically opposed to that of the tortured artist, suffering for her art, a pessimist in her watchtower, grieving that no one understands her while doing nothing to avoid it.

A.G., in contrast, manifests a vitalist optimism, from the joy of living that comes from the satisfaction of day-to-day reality, as compared to that forced tradition of attending to tragedy, to the championing of black as the colour of pain and death, of a dead-end street.

A.G. shows us her delight in a cultural tradition in which it seems that these states of spirit are repudiated, not well thought of. We arrive at our understanding of others through trauma and illness, the artist is obliged to suffer, to confront the anxiety of the empty studio, the mythical blank canvas; happiness is supposed to be out of reach of the self-absorbed creative genius, in his discourse, in his marking of accesses and his endless bemoaning of this situation, generally self-created with a view to raising his artistic standing.

“What were you doing there all day?” I once asked him. “Nothing. I painted what was happening.” “And what the hell happens there?” I continued, somewhat warily. “Time happens: time passes.” (He smiled). The above extract from a conversation between Mitsuo Miura and Vicente Llorca came into my mind as I was reflecting on the conversations I have had with Arancha, and in fact Mitsuo spoke to me a number of years ago of that ‘simplicity’ in the act of fashioning his pictures, of recounting his happiness and relating the bounty of his life, something that I find myself faced with again now.

We always catch on too late. That is what happens. It is so much like nothing. And, once again, it is this subtle matter that we understand; this substance with no centre or any possible drama was the motive of the representation of these magnificent works. Nothing happens: time, the constant, light matter of painting.*

That nothing happening is a lot in the passing time of our artist, giving frivolity a wide berth and seeking the truly important in what is close to her, what is her own.

A.G. cuts up hundreds, thousands of snippets of adhesive vinyl tape of different colours and textures with different optical effects, which she patiently positions on a base surface to give form to her project. Strips of wood are gradually covered to constitute the parts of an assemblage mounted on the wall, completed with the presence of neon tubes, also of many different tones; in this way painting definitely abandons its place and ventures forth into the conquest of new modes of looking, of constructing its format: embracing the space in its three dimensions it comes to meet us physically, it adapts to the situation and breaks the bounds to which it has historically been confined, it expands and appropriates the place from where nothing existed; it is not a case of placing one surface on top of another, it is a case of dialoguing with it, emerging from it, engaging in a living together, adapting to the home where you are going to start out on a new phase, making yourself part of the place, making your mark, letting the place itself give its opinion and facilitating its dwelling there, with no demands or forced situations, quite naturally, as between equals.

This adapting to the place, the direct adhesion to the walls, is effected on other occasions directly, without mediation; the colours are presented on their surface in two very different materializations, unifying in a single presence the different natures of these walls.

The evident geometrizing is generated on the basis of a grid fixed to the surface in combination with a chaotic-seeming projection that is devoid of all intentionality as regards the differentiation between the two. The preset sections cast against the piece combine with those constructed on the wall, the result

being a two-way dynamic combination of flight and return, as A.G. entitled the piece from this series that she presented at the Fundación Botín, summing up in this way the double path opened up in these divertimenti, rigid in their lines, without limits in their conception; pieces that take their place in what Jaume Oliveras has designated, with reference to A.G.'s work, as the order of chaos or modern beauty. We find this duality recurring at different moments and in a number of pieces: light and colour, inside-outside, or the above-mentioned flight and return give us clues to the intentionality in their premisses, in their modes of addressing painting, in their mysteries examined from experiment and investigation.

We can in any case go back to the sea, where we are surprised once again with a gaze far removed from that we might have expected in its day-to-day cohabiting with a medium that is idealized in its strength, in its bravura as a sign of identity, and that A.G. presents to us as the sea of tranquillity, a manifestation once again of her approach to the search, another result of this being the large mural that presented itself to us as mere sensation, a random play of horizontal lines and small elements in unhurried colourist transit that was in some ways reminiscent of the first vinyl compositions that she presented a number of years ago now, and which managed to transmit the elegance and the calm of meditative contemplation before what the landscape once again offers us.

That monumentality is repeated in the large mural presented on the occasion of this show and serves, moreover, as a resume, a catalogue of intentions.

Constructed on the basis of reordered fragments of pieces the artist has produced over the course of her career, the central work occupies one whole side of the room, like a kind of sample of what her efforts and her work have achieved, in her insistence and her liking for games of fantasy, for the beautiful illusions she refuses to renounce.

The mural represents a daring gamble in its quality of revealing oneself just as one is, a kind of day-by-day narrative with no tricks or cheats, with no artifice that would serve to conceal the regrets we all harbour. Showing oneself without a mask is not easy, and we are not all prepared to embrace that situation; however, A.G. does so in a jump without a safety net, as only those who neither have nor wish to hold back anything for themselves can do.

At a moment in time when the boundaries between the different artistic disciplines are becoming less and less evident and are only postulated from intransigent positions or tautological commitments, to speak of painting constitutes an almost transgressive discourse, even if is done ironically and as part of a show that bears the rubric of photography. Nothing is further from the intentions of the author of the present text, which is accompanied by a companion text by Miguel Cereceda in the form of an exhaustive survey of the successive deaths and resurrections of the medium over the course of the last hundred years, identified on no fewer than seven occasions. From this perspective, the work of Arancha Goyeneche presents itself to us as a significant achievement in the opening up of new paths that promise to endure, with no need to adopt a posture of permanent self-defence, unless it be from the veracity of the present. The energy is thus put to other uses than that of postulating before something unnecessary and sterile, a posture too exhausting for someone who proposes enjoyment as a scarce asset, and one not to be renounced by those who believe in the joy of living.

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* The works referred to are from the series that Mitsuo Miura devoted to the Playa de los Genoveses in Cabo de Gata, Almería.

Quoted in the exhibition catalogue Mitsuo Miura, Koldo Mitxelena. Diputación Foral de Guipúzcoa. 1994.