NOTHING BEHIND THE SUN

By

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“It is only the shallow people who do not judge by appearances.

The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible”

Oscar Wilde, in a letter.

BEGINNING

I would have liked to have kept the first painting I did; I was about ten years old. My mother was taking some painting classes at our house. Those distinguished smells were constantly coming from the room where they worked, and with fascination, I wandered around the room once the class ended, and carefully examined all the instruments that she needed to do that thing she called painting. Later, I could not contain my curiosity so I decided to try and play; I grabbed one small canvas and with some basic instructions began painting a solar system. “Make it as if light was coming from one corner”, she said, “blur the color and add some more white every time”… I placed one big circle at the center and nine around it. I tried my best to give them volume with the light.

I would have liked to have kept that small painting, because it encapsulated a large amount of what I am currently investigating in my work: painting as a containment exercise, and as such, a tool that allows us to interiorize the world. By depicting a solar system on a finite flat surface, it became possible to introduce something remote and unobtainable into a small frame; that which was exclusively the container is now presented as content.
PAINTING AND WORDS

The following words pretend to have a friendly intercourse with my paintings, but since words and painting are different languages they belong to different realms. I have never had any affinity for words, nor have I felt the desire to use them to develop an idea. My interest is located where words have no function, where things have no name, and sensations are hard to describe.

Since the beginning of time, humanity has used the visible as its primary source of information; it is through our eyes that we establish our place in the surrounding world. Telescopes and satellites are in fact extensions of our eyes, and without them we could have never located our place in the universe. Verbal language came later as an attempt to define the visible; an attempt to explain what we see. The act of seeing came first, words came after. By seeing we recognize and establish our presence in relation to the other, it is in fact an active act of choice. Painting’s virtue relies on acknowledging that this act establishes our place in the world.

Along with the invention of words came the invention of meaning. Therefore, words will always say what they mean; house will always mean house; clear and direct. And it is there where the abysm lies. It is assumed that Art has meaning and by definition says something. But actually, Art is a real act and experience in itself; or as it’s put by Susan Sontag “A work of Art is an experience, not a statement or an answer to a question. Art
is not only about something, it is something. A work of Art is a thing in the world, not just a text or commentary on the world”¹.

When we are children we respond to art without the need for words and meanings; as we grow, verbal language grows as well in its importance. Little by little every element of our existence ends wrapped up in meaning. We have been born into a linguistic matrix that we have inherited historically and shared in community; and as such, each one of our thoughts are subordinated by this structure. I feel frustrated by the idea that for each one of our thoughts there is a word that confers its form and sense.

Painting, as a mental process, offers me the possibility to meditate on the development of thoughts, inexpressible by words, ideas that escape from being constrained by meaning. Thus, my approach to painting has been in search of that kind of knowledge that exists before language and favors to acknowledge what art does instead of what it says.

DESCRIPTION

I have made a series of large paintings (7 x 8 feet); they are gateways to spaces you can enter. They are slowly built by adding paint and correcting paint. I don’t make studies for the paintings, instead, by painting and correcting I reach a balance between something expected and something found. To a certain degree I know what I want to

develop, but I am partly just waiting to see what will emerge from the slow negotiation between my body and the material. A painting is finished when something unexpected happens, something that I couldn't do consciously; the painting reveals itself with more knowledge than I could have imagined. But before this occurs, I struggle a lot. As a result, the paint surface records the agglomeration of layers of information, ideas and decisions that are taken. I like to think that these layers of paint help to extend the read of the painting, help us realize that the content of a painting cannot be detached from the actual physical feeling of its made surface.

My paintings describe spaces that navigate between open and enclosed spaces. I consider these spaces platforms that allow the viewer to be an active participant in front of the space depicted; this is why what happens after a painting is finished is extremely important for me. I love the artist, Marcel Duchamp´s idea of an artwork being a machine to generate meaning. He states that the artist does not know the real meaning of his work and the viewer as someone that should always participate reinforcing the creation and interpretation. In thinking about this, my current work presents a scene, a set up of elements of a stage. They invite the viewer to enter these settings and experience them and to activate a possible set of actions.

My paintings also respond to my fascination of light as the phenomena that defines our reality and color as its physical manifestation. To reflect this idea, I made small models of the spaces on which the paintings are based and by projecting light into them I control how the space is revealed. Once I have a desired angle of light, I transfer it onto
the painting using color as the carrier of light. My understanding of color is based on the
the actual physical properties of light and in my work, I express the ways in which light
manifests itself in our world, something that eyes can not perceive entirely.

Edges are also relevant in my paintings because they emphasized the painted image as
content inside a delimitated space. I want the viewer to be aware of the existence of the
four edges and corners of the object presented. An unpainted edge or a highlight over it
are tricks that I use to guide the eye towards the borders of the painting; sometimes I
introduce a diagonal line from one corner to the other of the same axis to accentuate
strongly the importance of edges in my work.

OPEN

My curiosity for open spaces is rooted in numerous experiences of my childhood. I grew
up caught between the flow of rural and urban places. Every weekend I visited our farm
house, spending two days a week in the field, in an open space. There I gained a wide
encyclopedia of sounds, smells, colors and textures. My experience of the city was quite
the oposite, things were flat and regular, everything had to be practical and serve
specific function. As a result, the experience of living simultaneously in both spaces
generated in me a strong understanding of the vibrant contrasts between open and
closed.
When I started painting regularly, landscape became my subject matter. This decision was an intuitive response to the pleasure of painting being linked to the pleasure of being in an open space. At this point, John Constable became my favorite painter; I was mostly impressed by his cloud studies, because in them, I understood how nature allows painting to behave ambiguously, somewhere in between the concrete and the undescriptive. This idea was then put into words by the English author, William Gilpin in the 1790s introduced the concept of the picturesque, as a kind of beauty that is best expressed in painting. According to his texts, nature with its rough and jagged rocks, steep mountains, messy foliage and strange animal physiognomies, offers countless models where the irregular, the rough or misshapen are characterized gracefully by the brush.

I believe that the term picturesque helps us to acknowledge that painting is not just a tool to represent a motif, but it is a representation in itself, confronting the subject, making the image proclaim its meaning not from what we know about it, but from the matter that constitutes it; by the evidence of its making, by the how painting takes it’s place against its motif. Therefore, It does not seem strange that historically every time painting had a significant change, the initiative came from landscape painting. Landscape became the arena of experimentation where the Art of painting could take greater risks.

Subsequent to the idea of the picturesque, landscape painting faced the problem of how to deal with the uncontainable, the infinite, the unmeasurable and the uncontrollable. I
found this notion well articulated in the *Moon Palace* by the American novelist Paul Auster. Auster describes, one episode that goes as follows: “In 1917, one American landscape painter goes on an adventure to the western lands of the United States following the advice of a fellow painter that argued how important is to go to the west if one wants to acquire a sense of space and dimension. Once there, the land is monstrous and the problem of the painter is to confront the size of things; the space goes on and on into the infinite, the dimensions before his eyes are inconceivable, earth and sky fail to be converted into one thing, in a measurable object. Everything is too immense to be drawn or painted. Finally, the painter comes to realize that the space before his eyes is indifferent to his judgments and interpretations, and therefore everything seen in a landscape is a human projection over something completely inhuman, nothing more that an attempt to control and comprehend the world before our eyes.”

Nature doesn’t know how lovely, charming and violent it is, - it doesn’t pretend to know - nature just doesn’t care; and in the meantime we feel the desire to dominate and control it. This is revealed clearly in a series of drawings by Leonardo da Vinci entitled *Deluge*. Here, a wide variety of lines suggest the unstoppable and uncontrollable power of nature, but actually, it is the drawn mark of the hand that actually controls and dominates the natural phenomena. One can see that the drawings are not a servile representation of nature; natural phenomena becomes fanciful events born from imagination and detached from nature. Here, I believe, in the desire to describe nature lies the impulse to dominate it. Or, as put by the philosopher, Nietzsche in *The Birth of
Tragedy; “Art is not an imitation of nature, but its metaphysical supplement, raised up beside it in order to overcome it”²

On the whole, landscape painting led me to understand how intriguing and complicated our relation is to the world. But mostly, I came to understand that painting became an invention that provides us with the possibility to introduce the unmeasurable into a contained space. Painting gives us the power to dominate and control the world; the power to decide how something is presented to us; the power to decide when something starts and when it ends. A painting surface is able to introduce what is out there onto a plane with dimensions and edges. Any motif painted becomes contained.

CLOSE

The spaces built by men are all fortresses, statements of our existence where we safeguard and defend ourselves against our eminent extinction and disappearance. If we consider the position of the human body as vertical we can infer that the situation of human beings in the world has never been very comfortable. Our bodies evolved in such a way to make possible to stand straight and have the ability to look at the horizon, at the sky and at all distant things. However, our bodies can not maintain such a posture for long periods of time and therefore we feel the need to sit or lay down. Naturally, the first humans started building vertical structures to preserve the survival advantages of

such posture. It seems then that the nature of existence is an expression that grows from the ground and constantly challenges gravity.

Our buildings, our walls, help us to maintain our standing vertical posture; they ensure our existence. Yet these constructions, on which we rely, are not only physical, but also cultural constructions. These walls of science, morality, politics, religion, the arts are all uprisings created to validate our ideas of existence. We might think that the concepts and values that we live with were created to replace our *animal spontaneity*, that kind of pre-linguistic knowledge that goes harmoniously with the universe, that kind of knowledge that we lost since the moment we stood straight and started to *think*. This knowledge we have lost is the one that makes the action, on an animal for example, always truthful and transparent. The ability to lie, to conceive and represent fictions is inherent to our humanity and makes possible the existence of art itself. To explain this further it is appropriate to look back at Cave Art. By drawing a bull, it became possible to make what is not present ‘seen’ and therefore ‘present’. The drawing materializes our ability to create and represent fictions. That drawing is and isn’t a bull. The bull is brought inside the cave by the means of depicting its presence. Hence my belief that painting since its beginning, is a mechanism to fill an absence with the simulacrum of a presence, by mobilizing what is far and removed, to the near and immediate.

Architecture, often called the Mother of the Arts, during the Renaissance offered all visual arts a space to exist. As a principle, the architectural space has the function to delimitate, it creates borders; any architectural structure breaks the endless extension of
natural space by creating the distinction of interior/exterior. Using the author, John Berger’s words: “Something painted may be placed in the wilderness, far from any human habitation, but, when this happens, the image only works as an appeal to a superhuman power who exists outside time and space. No image can withstand natural or cosmic space alone. As soon as a image is addressed, it requires the meditation of the space proposed by a human habitation or a human tomb: it needs to be surrounded by other human work (this ‘surrounding’ was at the origin of architecture), it needs the assurance of an interior”\(^3\). Painted images will always need the roof, the floor and the walls; motherly architecture provides them protection from the open spaces by offering its interior.

Now, if all painted images need an interior, is it possible to think painting as an interior itself? It is my belief that the creation of the interior/exterior gave place to the urgency to move what is outside, the unmeasurable, the remote, the other; to the inside. As previously stated, painting allows us to control those notions by introducing them onto a painted surface delimitated by its edges. Each painting, then, can be considered an independent separate space in which the painter compose things inside it. From people to apples, from animals to mountains, the sun, the sky, trees, the night and everything in between has been depicted in paintings, and when painted, all those things are arranged as if they inhabit an interior. To paint is ‘to bring inside’, first into the frame of the painted surface, and secondly into the space around the image. In doing so, painting allows us to set our own order and understanding over the visible world.

\(^3\) BERGER.John. *the place of painting. The sense of sight.* Vintage international. p 213.
Painting virtue relies on allowing us to compose, as if we were arranging an interior, our own visual experience of the world; an exercise to master the world emotionally. Painting paradoxically invites the spectator into its frame, into the interior presented, to examine the world beyond. To Paint is to bring inside, yet what is brought inside is in fact far away, out of reach.

Presently, the Internet, as the latest mechanism mobilizing the far to the near, is making us believe that edges are diffuse and that we are mobilizing as nomads between spaces; now it is possible to see every square foot of the our planet by using Google maps. You can actually visit any place of the world while your body remains fixed in front of a screen projecting the simulacrum and fiction of that which is far away. We have now distanced ourselves from the world in such a way that we no longer know when we will encounter a wild animal again, or where exactly our food comes from. We have created a world that ensures our own survival but at the same time we have detached ourselves from the world we live in.

The visible remains our main source of content for the world. Thanks to the visible we recognize our surroundings while bringing the world closer to us, yet reminding us that in this world we run the risk of getting lost. Everything that is brought inside are only appearances, detached from the time and place in which they existed. Through the visible we obtain an understanding of world, but at the same time the visible distances us and removes us from it.
ASTRONOMY

The practice of astronomy has served man to set an exact position on earth in relationship to a point in the sky. I find it deeply poetic that we can not know where we are on earth except in relation to the moon or a star. Before we were able to make accurate maps and describe territories it was necessary to look at the sky. Thus, we locate a here only in relation to the existence of there, and not the other way around; If we had not looked up, we would not have found our place down here on earth. We define and recognize ourselves only by looking at what and where we are not. Only through distant seeing can we take consciousness of our existence. We need the far and unfamiliar to locate a here. To think and to paint is to locate our place in the world.
REFERENCES

Auster, Paul. “the moon palace”
   Editorial Anagrama, S. A., Barcelona 1996
PIECES IN THE EXHIBITION

_COSMOGRAMA_

Oil on canvas

80 x 98 inches

2015
LEVE GRAVIRAR  [to mildly gravitate]

Oil on canvas

80 x 98 inches

2015
NOTHING BEHIND THE SUN

Oil on canvas

98 x 74 inches

2015
INSTALLATION VIEWS