
Fertile Melancholy

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Only a little ago, in a conference in the Walter Benjamin Hall of the INHA¹ (Paris), within the frame of a Masters on Visual Arts of the Saint Denis University I was asked to give a talk on recent Spanish painting beyond those painters enjoying a broader media presence and general acclaim, and of course, those well rooted in France in the recent decades. It was a completely new painting for those international students: Turkish, Chinese, Iranian, German, some Saudi Arabian, and French of course. A group of forty or fifty finely trained people, who I remember to be very attentive and, above all, participating a lot. During the talk, with the support of a big screen, the time came to introduce and list artists. Then iPads, smartphones, cameras and all kinds of mobile devices were put to work, with the aim of retaining, perhaps being able to draw up even a small map of names to begin exploring a territory unknown to them. The talk gave way to a small debate on their own interests and similarities with the work of Spanish painters in the last few decades. Personally, I paid attention especially to the painters that were mentioned and that would be part of a larger list that was first drawn up at the University of La Cambre (Brussels) and other centres where I have had the pleasure to participate.

Spanish painting is notoriously unknown but so is French painting to us, as those from Belgium, Luxemburg, Romania and so many European and non-European places. However, by paying attention to particularities we end up associating attitudes and strategies to a national model, what really interests us is not their idiosyncratic features, that are more and more globalised, but their unknown details. Those details that

strengthen a painting in a way that cannot be explained and that fascinates us, and which origin puzzles us.

In this exchange of names and authors that I have been recently involved in, there are paintings that share a certain humour. These are paintings of a melancholic nature. Their existence refers, even in a tangent way, to something already existing. As a palimpsest, adding itself to a text that was already written, to one or several photographs, images or scenes which reference demands to be reformulated at all costs, in a very impatient way.

In these times that accepting ambiguity and mystery in images is so hard, we find paintings that aim at a model of appropriation that is more concerned with triggering emotions than in deepening the documentary formula, which is so politically correct. Through unexpected associations, overlapping ideas and fragile, crumbling shapes, regret has become an unmistakable gesture of our painting, it gives the impression that there is a complete lack of concern about technical virtuoso performance or representation. The idea of progress, in its more determinist and technological sense has been finally abandoned and silenced. Under an apparent realism, as though a labour-intensive quilt, this is a painting that cumulates scenes and small fragments of the most ironic, absurd memory. It is precisely here where I find a coincidence between the paintings of Marc Desgrandchamps² and those of Nuria Rodríguez. In both, a fertile melancholy, an alteration of this humour without which it would be impossible to notice and lend substance to many of the transformations that they propose and that are coming our way.

1. Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art_www.inha.fr

2. Recent French painting is highly disconcerting. Many point at Marc Desgrandchamps (Sallanches, 1960), producing one of the most disturbing, attractive bodies of work. It could hardly be pigeonholed in any of the movements with a wider tradition in French painting of the last few decades: the supports-surfaces movement and the extensive narrative figurative.