GRACIELA SACCO

NADA ESTÁ DONDE SE CREE...

MUSEO DE ARTE DEL BANCO DE LA REPÚBLICA, BOGOTÁ
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single technique, given the artist’s clear determination to experiment with media such as painting, sculpture, video, and photography. Nevertheless, after visiting the two levels of the museum, we notice three lines of force that proved a semantic field to his work: color, history, and humor.

A significant example of this tripartite relationship is the series of paintings titled Hotel América (America Hotel), dated between 1994 and 1995. Against a green background and mounted on a lilac-colored wall, the contrast between the work and the exhibition design invited the viewer to lean closer. Observing the details, we noticed the image of a man in European-Renaissance dress, conversing with two seated semi-nude human figures and situated in front of a landscape that opened up through a line of fugue. Below the narrative circle that presented this scene, the recoding of a grotesque painting where we read “America” and “circa 1505.”

This articulation of signs reveals the artist’s acid position concerning the creation of European images of the Americas during colonization. Joaquin Rodríguez del Paso revisits the mages that construed, in cultural terms, the territory of the Americas as a paradisiacal space and, as the title puts it, a space for hotels and tourism. Can we visualize the colonizers of Latin America as the first guests in that vast territory? Or, going back to the image and looking at it in a perverse way, wouldn’t it be more interesting to see them as the first entrepreneurs, responsible for taking the land from the natives, sectioning it, and, little by little, transforming the population into guests?

Another image by the artist puts it in a drier and more direct way: America was built many times in a “history in black and white,” where the whites were, literally, carried by the blacks on their backs, and the relationship between colonizer and colonized assigned well-defined roles. Even if we are aware of this historical trajectory, what surprises us in this exhibition is how the artist’s gaze does not provide images derived from the articulation of literal images of the relationship between image, politics, and Latin America.

It was difficult not to laugh as we approached Leg godt (Leg Godt), from 1996. On the walls around the sculpture, which stood on the floor, were two sentences wavering between explanation and the confusion generated by the image: “Henry Moore found inspiration in pre-Columbian sculpture” and “Plastic was found in some Maya archaeological sites.” The work, made entirely with Lego pieces, referred to one of the most recognizable figures in the history of the arts found in the territories occupied by the Maya civilizations: the Chac Mool.

While, on the one hand, it is true that in his figures in a state of repose British sculptor Henry Moore dialogued with ancient non-European sculptural traditions, by suggesting the presence of plastic in archeological sites, on the other, Rodriguez del Paso is being ironic not only about “the paths of modern sculpture” (as Rosalind Krauss would put it), but also about the relationship between the West, the culture of consumerism, and Latin America. Art history and its generally Eurocentric point of view was able to identify a type of Maya sculpture, but it would not be capable, returning to the previous paintings, of reconfiguring the clearly colonizing relationship of some of its own historiographical approaches.

It is important to keep in mind the title of this work: Leg godt, which is the Danish term from which the name Lego originated, meaning “to play well.” The phrase is an important clarifying principle for the way in which the artist operates on different layers of images. Be it in a work like Mején-Go (Mején-Go), from 2004, where the map of Central America is the support for a game of foosball in which the audience is invited to participate, or in a work that considers the relationship between image and geometry via the design of cardboard boxes for pizza delivery, Rodríguez del Paso’s gaze is perspicacious in terms of its ability to play with materials, shapes, and words, in a game of signifier and signified that keeps the audience smiling, but also in dialogue with the historical and geographical memory of Costa Rica and Latin America.

Going back to the artist’s words, after posting the series of questions above, he comments: “Obviously, there are no answers: only paradigmatic proposals.” This questioning character, free nevertheless of the desire for definitive answers, is what gives potency to his work, reminding us that playing with the image and with history, while not necessarily serious, is always difficult.

__Raphael Fonseca__

SAN JUAN / PUERTO RICO

Allan Jeffs

Space at 281 on San José Street

An event that received little attention but that in the long run will have greater resonance, the exhibition titled “Ex-istence” by Allan Jeffs at the Espacio del 281 de la Calle San José in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, remained open until January of 2015. The show included some works that Jeffs, an Ecuador-based Chilean artist who studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in Puerto Rico, created during several expeditions he made to Antarctica.

A lover of the polar landscape, Jeff joined a 2013 scientific mission organized by the Instituto Antártico Ecuatoriano bound for
Antarctica with the goal of studying extremophiles and other microorganisms from the Ecuadorian station Pedro Vicente Maldonado. There, in the icy and spectacular natural environment of Antarctica, Jeffs mounted an installation that he titled *Ex-sistencia* (*Existence*). The work consisted of twelve large pieces shaped like kneeling or seated human figures that look like penitents. Empty shells made with fiberglass, these figures were produced by the Cruz family—headed by José Cruz—from the southern area of the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, a family dedicated to making años viejos (old years), the Ecuadorian version of the Spanish Falles. The cloaks or headdresses that cover the figures were hand woven from toquilla straw by coastal communities.

Overcoming strong wind, low temperatures and continually feeling the dangers of the unpredictable environment, Jeffs placed the sculptures with great effort in eight points across an area that includes Fort William Point, Traub Glacier, Quito Glacier and Barrientos Island, among others. In the process of installing the penitents, Jeffs appears in some pictures tied to a big rock to avoid falling into the depths of rivers and glaciers. The photographs of the penitents surrounded by the southern ice are impressive because they highlight human isolation in these inhospitable places. They emphasize the feeling of smallness and helplessness that human beings can experience when confronted with an overwhelming and sublime natural environment.

Some of the sculptures of the penitents were part of the exhibition in San Juan, along with about 20 drawings and watercolors made in situ that showed the places traveled by Jeffs. Due to the strong wind and the speed with which he had to work, Jeffs kept the drawings folded in the pocket of his coat or in his backpack. These same drawings are part of the exhibition and still show the folding lines—like those in maps or cartographies of places already visited. They are reminiscent of drawings by Alexander von Humboldt, Salvador Rizo or Francisco Javier Matis, who accompanied José Celestino Mutis in his expeditions across the South American continent.

In the San Juan exhibition, Jeffs also showed a documentary on the drawings he made with culture medium in Petri dishes at the Ecuadorian station Pedro Vicente Maldonado. During the long hours that he spent in that research station, he learned from Ecuadorian scientists some of the laboratory techniques used to study micro specimens.

The work by Allan Jeffs is a combination between art and science that, as result of a journey of exploration to one of the most extraordinary natural scenarios in the world, refer us to the meaning of life, to the dangers that man can face and his confrontation with death. Jeffs’ penitents seem to suggest that even in this age of technology, kneeling before the white vastness of the polar territory is a reminder that the sacred and the human can still merge into a timeless whole.

Ingrid María Jiménez Martínez

SANTIAGO / CHILE

Pablo Chiuminatto
Extention Center at Universidad Católica de Chile

Besides being a renowned painter in today’s Chilean art scene, Paul Chiuminatto (1965) is an academic with a PhD in Philosophy, Aesthetics and Art Theory and a member of literature study centers associated with local universities; in other words, he is also an interdisciplinary theoretician. Therefore, upon entering his exhibition titled “Landscales of Study,” one was already expecting that the highly visual simplicity of his painting and the emphasis on the tradition of landscape were only the surface of a series of reflections.

The show offered relationships with key referents to art history and gender that appear immediately: William Turner and Caspar David Friedrich and the painting of Romanticism; Chilean teachers Alfredo Hilsby and Paul Burchard, who represented the incursions by traveling artists into landscape painting—from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century—the exploration of the local natural world, the rejection of the academicism, and the emergence of modernism. Also present were, on the one hand, Adolfo Couve and his intimist and nostalgic visions of everyday reality developed during the 1980s in Chile, and, on the other, that which could generally be described as the effects of the “painterly” realism that is practically a school in Chile—which internationally may be represented by artists like Gerhard Richter and Luc Tuymans.

Perhaps a result of his reflective nature, Chiuminatto has spent nearly twenty years exploring an overly defined field. It is as if all this time he has been working on countless versions of the same landscape. Open until March of this year, the exhibition offered a view of a misty field—perhaps captured at dawn or at dusk—framed by a composition in which light patches and brief signs rendered the sky, the ground and the horizon; and sometimes trees and crops as well. Through graphism, panning and washes these “Landscales of Study” were presented as if they were half done, nearing their full realization, insistent, one painting after another, through rigorous and minimalist repetition. It

Allan Jeffs. *Penitentes*, 2014. Installation with human size figures at Mount Plymouth Glacier, Antarctica. Straw and fiberglass. Each figure: 35 1/4 x 23 1/4 x 23 1/4 in. (90 x 60 x 60 cm).