

## THE ESSENTIAL TALENTS OF SANTIAGO SERRANO

It is hard, in these times of very moving aesthetics, to get rid of that pessimistic tone when we think about art, loudly extolled by the biennialist mechanism which it delivers, with arms and baggage, to banality without support. Marketing (made in Saatchi) which imposed the slogan of “the return to painting” over recent years along with that brought and carried “vitamin P” has been, without a shadow of a doubt, the demerol finishing touch that a practice which requires time for contemplation, if I am allowed the truism, actually needed.

Not all artistic statements fortunately accept zapping, previously the opposite, some resist the distracted perception and only reveal their “secret” when a pause is made and the imaginary of the other accepts the invitation of a different space.

Painting is, largely, a raised territory, that tense scope where we have to penetrate without touching, with a haptic vision, enjoying both the details and the whole.

Beyond the “ironic” alibi and the self-satisfying ornamentality, an artist such as Santiago Serrano shows through the potentiality of pictorial space, he has the extreme capacity to take us towards the dominion (without exact maps) of poetry. Santiago Serrano is undoubtedly one of the artists who, since the seventies, has shown greatest concern to achieve pure painting, following, in a very personal way, the lines established by Mondrian (his rhythmic conception and rigorous geometry), Malevitch (particularly in his support for nihilism), Rothko (with those frontiers where the colourful field literally vibrated). In his work there is blend of complex simplicity that reveals sensitivity joining on to romanticism, but without the theatricality or affectation. These surfaces, pulled tense in the strictest modern tradition, have, excuse the paradox, a notable density, in them the artist hides from the anecdotic, both in the figurative, narrative sense and in the melodramatic gestural projection, and allows them to settle or to show moods.

This artist, committed to pictorial stripping, i.e. a voluntary reductionism, has developed a proposal in a significant solitude. Some critics have spoken about the “threadbare paintings” by Santiago Serrano as territories or temporary sedimentation or, in other terms, surfaces on which the spiritual pulsates and the earthly dimension is shown at the same time.

The controlled blotches, the veiling, the geometry and the tremble of limits dominate these pieces of work of imposing presence, in which the impeccably “baked” colours are difficult to define. This is certainly not a hasty artist, quite the contrary, in his work there is a slow rhythm, or better said, a natural quality that we could link to that serenity which, according to Heidegger, was allowing what is noble to come forth in a return to what is essential (a kind of lethargy, allowing things to be as they are in the breach of the world and the earth).

Allowing painting to settle does not exclude internal dynamism, i.e. prodigious musicality of what has “reacted” (chemically speaking) on the opaque surface of the painting. That visual rhythm of the painting by Santiago Serrano, extremely subtle, produces a feeling of mystery and even shows an analogy with silence, and, at the same time making once think about the idea of emptiness, in that spacing that is the utopian zero of shapes when the point maximises energetic concentration. Santiago Serrano, with a style that has been defined as a peculiar mannerist minimalism,

creates striking pieces of art which, sometimes, have an obvious sculptural dimension. Balance, and mediation about finiteness and infiniteness.

In some pieces of work by this artist, the aquatic or the evocation of clouds of the blotches is fractured by the geometry, by those vertical lines that are reminiscent of Barnett Newman who, in his essay "The Sublime is Now" spoke about a feeling of delight when something happens and no more good than nothing, a happening on the limits of what can be expressed which he discusses: a stripping in which one escapes from anxiety, the way in which the transcendent materialises. The hypnotic painting of Santiago Serrano's hue is as interrogative as it is poetic. When contemplating the series "Instruments" (1998) there is an extraordinary variation of the same thing which makes differences of scale, position, shading, etc., arise.

These shapes have a mythological background, the image of the walking stick refer to sight and, of course, to ancestral wisdom, which is not abstract geometry, but rather, to quote the artist's own words, "the sacred representation of what is inside, the mise-en-scène of the inner instruments, the crook, the square, the circle". The horrific reflection of identity in narcissism, the seeing blindness of Tiresias or the confrontation with the enigma of Oedipus name what is fatal, that dark destiny that Santiago Serrano turns, through his work, into something emblematic. The spirituality and even the romanticism of this artist do not take him to the theatricality of the surrounding world, but, quite the contrary, to an exploration of its finiteness. "Those instruments" warns Luis Moliner, "that are instruments of passion, appear like a journey, step by step, on a vital complete cycle, parallel to the myth of death and resurrection". The figure, and not the figurative, is the praise for this work from a nearly disconcerting pureness, in which silence and musicality, as I have already said, are interwoven, where the emptiness, like that Toko that was not narrated, nostalgically, by Tanizaki in his Praise of the Shadow, is fullness.

The evocation that Santiago Serrano makes of life as a labyrinth is undoubtedly a clear-thinking awareness of loneliness, an heroic demand for another look that knows how to "listen" to what is beyond belief. Santiago Serrano's work exhibited at Ana Serratosa in his Space (converted, undoubtedly, in a reference in Valencia, for Spanish contemporary painting, since others have been exhibited here such as Carlos Franco, Manolo Quejido and Alfonso Albacete) contain a certain painting / sculptural air about them: toying with space, becoming the owner of angles, they take in a metallic geometry of reductionist painting and at the same time, luxurious.

There is something of revision in the lines by Mondrian but giving them an impacting spatiality. Because Santiago Serrano wants his work to occupy its own space, without shrillness or rhetorisation, joining his inner self with the capacity to take control of the look. His clear constructive will, cemented in a game that has something of musical variation, draws a line of resistance to the stylistics of what is banal. The same artist, quoting Jean Baudrillard, the theorist obsessed with simulation, pointed out that "compared to the obscenity of showing everything, of uncovering it all in images to move us from what is real to what is hyper-real, imposes itself over fear". There is no art nor subjectivity without secrets and neither are we able to comprehend anything without silence.

To use Danto's words, after having abused beauty, we know that the nuances of art must be urgently recovered. Santiago Serrano is certainly one of the most honest and vigorous artists collaborating in that effort to acquire an ethical dimension: to give some

dignified back to the look, to donate time of poetical contemplation. The rest (what is missing and not what is in excess) is silence.