

UNDER THE COTTON BUFFER

The second decade of the nineties could be considered the first period of post-war art in Central America. It is during those years that a series of formal changes take place, introduced by a general aperture towards the outside world, that allows artists to distance themselves from the almost obliged revolutionary interest, but also from the stereotyped art of representing national values, linked to the most conservative sectors of society. Furthermore, a few recurring themes and concepts are perceived, like the staging of certain hidden aspects of society, a subtle reference to the "darker side of the moon", a space that remains in the shadows of evidence, invisible, repressed but omnipresent. In occasions, this shadow is located in the realm of a complacent historical or political discourse, in others, it darkens the boundaries of intimacy, of social interaction and behavior conventions, and finally it also can operate as a conditioner of memory, and thus of identity itself. In a parallel way, there is a growing sensibility towards the new faces of power, that act through misinformation or the excess of information, that submerge public opinion in a confusing mess of news, events and data that hinder an adequate perception of reality.

On the other hand, most of the artists work from a personal position that has put aside the pretension of assuming a collective voice, which is a logical reaction to the disenchantment in front of the failed messianic discourses, but also, proves the remaining of individual utopias that take the shape of personal comments on a context, of gazes that question the visible status-quo, and invite to reflect on non-assumed realities, that turn to irony and humor, and are linked to the unexpected, the uncanny and the frightening in daily life, including intimacy.

In general, objects and installation work, plus the unlimited possibilities generated by the photographic image and the digital media, have been the resources to elaborate these topics in a more direct way, articulating them with a more austere language and keeping within a muted chromatic effect, linked to the meaning of works. This contributes a different approach to formal issues, a research for more decanted visual solutions in which contrasting materials, textures, forms and elements are set up to build sense through the relations that are established in a zone of vicinity. Priscilla Monge is one of the figures that since early on in the nineties, has pointed towards an interesting direction in the relation to the contrasting of opposites that create significant paradox, but also in the perception of the common as an unsuspected universe. It seems like the failure of what seemed to be great utopian projects, but in fact were equally authoritarian and exclusive, would have detonated a change in frequency of the general sensibility, there is at present an increase in the awareness of how, within daily life, the tragedies and great dramas of humanity are created and developed. One talks (in a low voice) of what is not seen (but is sensed) of what is not heard but is there, in ambush, behind a beautiful scene, calm and quiet, one of order and ominous silence.

RONALD MORÁN (El Salvador 1972) belongs to the generation of artists that initiate their creative process in the nineties, in a society still immersed in

the end of the armed conflict, and that acquire more maturity around ten years after the signing of the peace treaties in Central America: a political and military peace, but a society still at war with itself through urban criminality and domestic violence, where conflicts are still not solved through dialogue, but through aggression, and where the familiarity with weapons has started in childhood, in the playroom and the buying of bellicose toys for some, or in daily violence of struggle for life in the streets for others. A society where the rules of the game are not clear, except in the street, where the real knowledge of reality is unattainable, and the place of truth is unknown.

The work of Ronald Morán appears in the national drawing salons in El Salvador, characterized by a formal research that values space as significant, and that stands out by a clean line and a de-centered position of figures. A more pictorial period follows, developing the symbolic meanings and shapes of fish and their relation to the human condition. However, it is from the production of works directly related to the social and urban present, like the series "Successive Alterations", that his work starts to consolidate itself in a more coherent way. In this series, the artist turns once again to the place as a value of sense, and he saturates completely the surface of acetates with superimposed digital prints, taken from various sources of graphic information and news. Formally, this produces a suggesting image, built in gray and black tones, but most of all, confusing, that unveils progressively the successive informative contents that compose it. These digital compositions, that cancel one information with the next, have particularly developed over-manipulated events like the Irak invasion, at the global level, or the gang problems in El Salvador and other Central American countries, at the local one.

The work of Morán, from the installation "Home Sweet Home", starts to appear as the tri-dimensional diffuminating of a drawing, in which edges and rims of furniture and objects are rounded and softened with the white, spongy silence of a white cotton lining. From an eminently urban body of work, Morán turns towards the domestic space, towards intimacy, that also hides its reality to the outside. This work is an image of how frightening the family context can become; of the war that can take place in a dreadfully sly manner, and thus difficult to face, as the enemy is living under the same roof, sharing the daily meals. It is no longer about the open war conflict, where the rules of the game are more clear, and where the "who goes there?" rules the days of the fighters. Here, combat is unequal and it is disguised under the appearances of a common daily, family life: the kitchen of a simple home, where the family reüntes around meals, and where any element of daily use is a potential weapon, where the enemy shares room and board.

Morán created another versión of this series at MARTE (Art Museum of El Salvador), building a child's bedroom with similar characteristics, in which the toys lined with white cotton lining were all related to violence, military fighting – combat planes, machine-guns, war tanks and others. These pieces act as a comment, from the artistic side and from a very efficient aesthetic statement, about this familiarity with violence, about the complicities that allow aggression, and about the silencing that covers most

of the events. The artist has also realized other installations with the same materials and techniques: one of them referring directly to the oil issue, using large drums equally lined in white, which in fact referred to the blackness of oil, and organized like a tower in the gallery space. Another one used all kinds of furniture hanging in a hap-hazard way from the ceiling or other parts of the exhibition space, as the aftermath of an earthquake or a metaphor of everyday chaos. The softness and whiteness of the lining are elements that act as silencers of reality, as acoustic and chromatic insulators and isolators, in order to live in an illusory world that refuses to face itself. At the same time, these pieces interrogate the concept of the white cube as an immaculate receptacle for artworks, and becomes here a dismembered and disquieting space.

For his exhibition at the New World Museum Houston, Ronald Morán has chosen to go back to the source of the violence-laden objects, and presents display cases and shelves of an imaginary toy-shop where the spectator is confronted by the enormous offer in this line. He has also included logos of the aggressive video games that proliferate among children and youngsters, as "Mortal Combat", and also objects like a large water-pistol or a game of Indians and Cowboys. By representing the objects in the cotton material instead of presenting the object itself lined in it, Morán returns to drawing, and creates volumes, shades, lines, with a particular lighting effect on the tri-dimensional images of these objects. Finally, a piece that announces a new path in the work of Morán: a circular stationary target made in glass with sand-blasted lines. Here the artist not only refers to the game but also to the idea of an one and only possibility in the random firing. This target only allows a single opportunity of a hit: the objective will be destroyed from the first time, whether it touches the center or not. This piece opens other options of research in the field of fragility, which is, finally, what Morán has been developing since several years.

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