

Conversation

Sandra Santana and Laura Mesa

S. S. Let us begin with the title of the exhibition: *Pensar el final compromete el final*. If we apply this maxim to the artistic creation, it would appear to suggest that the result of the project will always be involved, as idea, germ or strength at the beginning of the creative process and that, therefore, there would be no space in it for the unexpected and it would all move forwards as planned. However, in previous works (I am thinking about *Epicultura* or *Estratos* from 2017 or, the most recent one, *Pero No El Mundo*) a dialogue with the random can be perceived, with the unpredictable. To what extent does your work have to do with the line that defines and develops the figure on paper, or with the mark/blot, with the stain, with denial, with an accident?

L. M. It is true that projects I have developed until today, as far as I conceive artistic practice, are structured, from the beginning, with a basis that has a clear ending. Perhaps, thinking about it, more than a result, I should talk about a reflection as the objective. It is the theoretical wonder and practice what flow towards a comprehension of, in a great scale, that final objective being no other than the process in itself. I understand a certain paradox can be generated when I suggest that what I intend to reach is the action of creating, and that can lead us to certain questions: Can we say this purpose is sufficiently robust to not allow any mistakes? Or, maybe, is the importance of the resulting object minimised when drawing is the objective? The truth is that some kind of osmosis occurs between both approaches, a coming and going that normally allows and underlines how those parts of the process concerned with the theoretical reflection and the practical reflection accept, give strength or challenge each other.

Every project has and allows me to think about –let us say– a subject matter that states the pulse and the specific direction of the works that define it. However, and in a subjacent way, in these last years, those specific subject matters have coexisted with

general interests and investigations over the actual language of art. This way, the difficulties between reality and representation, the paper of the drawing involved with it, have had a great influence as much in the grammar I work with as in the process that I use. I tell you this because it was at a stage of the long process of reflection over these matters where the delezian concept of error became important, while a mistake in representation might not make account on the representation but would on itself. Therefore the presence of a mistake, the stain that you mention or even a torn piece might not be intentional but it is very important as soon as you relate it with the reality of what is represented, with the reality of the piece and even with the actual concept of reality. I never try to eliminate an error, correcting or using fake alternatives; on the contrary, I present them –if there are any– as an element equally substantial as the other artistic mediums I use, because if drawing is real on something, it is so in being a particularly honest medium on its status of representing.

S. S. I am thinking that perhaps a mistake is not possible —or it would require a different category— where the representation is not intended to be a copy of an external reality of the piece. This is to say, the work is not a second degree reality, it does not take the place of something else. Could it be confirmed that the mistake makes us, somehow, become aware of the consciousness of the materialisation of representation?

I think that, somehow, the mistake is that which still connects us, as creators, with the human condition. We are immersed in a world where sophisticated technological and digital means are present more and more in every aspect of life. For our comfortable first world atmosphere, the consumption of products elaborated by industries where humans only supervise the correct function of a purely mechanical system of production is a common thing. Even more as time goes by, it is a luxury to be able to choose to surround ourselves with handcraft objects and not industrial ones. In my opinion, art seems to show a resistance towards these levels of digitalisation, but I also feel an irreplaceable tenderness on the fact that one of the few ways we still have to validate our authority against mechanised production is through mistakes, to differentiate ourselves from perfection, although it is a paradox that, on the other

hand, we are eager to achieve. With this I mean any kind of mistake. As you well said, we could tell the difference between the lack of technical perfection when it comes to copying a sensitive reality, but in my case I also make a reference to those defects produced in the production of a work of art, without these necessarily implying a lack of mimetic expertise. The demonstrated representation of an error is established, somehow, as a way of relating ourselves with the world, through artistic practice, like a happening through the act of creating that remains trapped in it.

Answering your question, to observe the error does not only make us become aware of the reality of the representation –as far as matter goes–, but also of our inability to achieve perfection at any time and with any action. And I think that is great, I understand it as an exercise of consciousness of certain limits which are undeniable and inherent to the fact of existence.

S. S. In your exhibition *Pero No El Mundo (but not the world)* you used a quote by Habermas (which you use again in this new exhibition) to show how the global numbers offered by the UN (geographical rates, birth and mortality rates, etc.) turn out to be absurd so as to make an account of that dimension of life where we deal and develop subjectivities. The rationalist and technological pretension with which everything can be put in numbers broke before the fragility of a hand that remembered obsessively through thin sheets of silk, the difficulty of representing the world. In general, does your work constitute a struggle with that difficulty of representing that lived reality?

L. M. Indeed. Nowadays we live an extraordinary tension when dealing with a new representationality that is no longer linked to an empirical truth. The paradigm is broken and this is no more than an example of, perhaps, the fact that determined difficulties keep resurrecting, in spite of us believing they have been annihilated. We can talk about meta realistic images, post materialism or even intermedia logics, but it would be entirely absurd to point out, in the 21st century, the existence of constant redefinitions of hyper mediatic or multimedia realities which have taken advantage of the existence of that weak reality noted by Vattimo; whose support depends on a transversal interpretation that will confront the sovereignty of a categorical hierarchical

organisation. In that sense, my work tries to constantly make evident our capability of becoming aware of reality.

This type of questions made me deal with, for example, *Pero no el mundo*. With Habermas as a starting point I developed a research to understand that lived world you are talking about, facing a world categorisation that tries to define us. I dive in the possibility the German philosopher gives us by distinguishing the “world of life” from the “systematical world”, so as to place, through drawing, the ability of the human being to reclaim the importance of causes; the vital part of analysing the sum of the circumstances which are the ones that, really, delimit what we are and our ability of action. This way, it is the drawing action what allows me to humanise, within that repeated action of generating substrates through more than 27,000 sheets of paper, hand cut, an X-ray of the reality that makes us look like mere results but also omits other components of the equation, those which make us human.

S. S. You are here talking about the reiterative action that generates the piece. Repetition, the series, very relevant aspects in your production which clearly connect with the art of the 20th century. However, the serial quality of your work is crafted, not mechanical or industrial as it happens with Ready-mades, Minimal art or Pop art. It seems as if repetition in your work leans more towards the process than the result, eliminating spontaneity and body language which, traditionally, are drawing skills. Could we be talking about ethics within your work here? What leads you to begin such a laborious process?

L. M. Quite the opposite of what it may seem at first sight, more than speaking about series, where the key can be found –and therefore it is worth focusing upon this– is the repetition, given that each one of these works are defined by multiple identical pieces. Or, even more relevant, the importance resides in the fact that this production process is defined, not as much in the resulting objectualisation –that too–, but in the action of drawing which is repeated an enormous amount of times. The reiterated movements, again and again, in a process which is honestly exhausting in occasions, manage to tense my own awareness on the creative act and my commitment with it, forcing me to

give preference to questioning the representation of the actual process and the practise it conveys, with everything it implies. This is about productions that are extremely large and conscientious; it is a process of resistance where you stop feeling, very deeply sometimes, the weight –real and symbolic– of the action of repeating the same action. I have been asked more than once if I am aware of each and every part of the process, even when technically it would have been plausible to delegate; but this is my work. How could I not do it? In that respect, yes, there is an ethical component in the way I do things, but I would not call it ethics of work but ethics of artistic process, in a commitment that redounds to the confirmation of my autonomy as a subject. Despite Walter Benjamin declaring this fact over a century ago, I understand that if philosophy uses language to think, art does so through crafting. This implies I have to use my hands as part of my work as an artist.

This pampered dedication on the act of drawing begins with the verification of a new paradigm which is growing in the atmosphere around representation. We are living a time where digital means, more updated as time goes by, are capable of generating images that fool very easily our perception. To be aware of the reality that surrounds us, until today, only depended on our senses –to see something, for example, implied that that thing existed–, however, nowadays this fact has been overtaken by a hyper-reality of technological origins. This need to think about reality in my work made me consider three dimensionality, with a clear intention to question the actual representation quality of the works and of the actual language of drawing. Why does a drawing have to be two dimensional when it can be built from the drawing itself in three dimensions? It is all about the fact that when you eliminate a layer of representation quality, the work becomes closer to that tension between reality and the representation I think about. In the middle of this investigation which is at the same time theoretical and formal, I turn to the concept of delezian difference, where I lean to address the identity of what is real. This leads me to repetition, moreover to the action of repeating as a process that leads to very long and complex productions.

S. S. In a large part of your works, the drawing tools (graphite, India ink) that usually vanish to create a trace and a shape, become the protagonists and the matter itself within the work. At the same time, the process of drawing, which usually has a character of immediacy in respect to the idea, transforms into a mediatic and complex process. In what way does your work still maintain a link with the traditional essence of drawing?

L. M. The tradition of drawing sets several guidelines that would be interesting to briefly identify. On the one hand, drawing has been historically situated, all the way up to the 20th century, between two aspects that determinate its conceptualisation, theorisation and thinking: one part goes by the hand of the first stage of gestation of an idea which, later, will become a painting or a sculpture and another part is the academically used medium for formation, implying with it the understanding of the materialisation of the gaze. On the other hand, we find characteristics of the actual action and materialisation: the presence of the line as a constructive resource by antonomasia, the monochrome, the use of charcoal, graphite or ink, the use of paper as a support, the small or medium formats, the speed behind the action, the limited simulations or the portability have defined, historically, what drawing is.

Starting with those premises, and with what I have explained as a basis, when I suggest that drawing makes a step towards the third dimension, it can only do so, in order to understand it as such, through its material nature. The two dimensional support, the rapidity it implies or the small formats can disappear only if, in exchange, the most representative materials for the practice of drawing enlarge their presence in such a way that the paper, the graphite –which directly takes us back to the drawn line– and the India ink –as paradigm of the drawn blot– need to rise as absolute protagonists of my works. In the same way, there is a clear intention of keeping that honesty previously mentioned that sets a strong line of plastic investigation. This way, the process I work in, rejects the use of structural devices; it lacks any kind of frame, support or container. This leads to the fact that the technical process of solidification of ink and graphite has become, in practice, a crucial investigation for me, fusing with the theoretical basis of my work and contributing a considerable enrichment to the aesthetic experience that

the pieces try to provide. For example, the solidification of graphite, what I consider to be a solid drawing is, also, a mine, literally a pencil with which, at the same time, one can draw. The solidification of ink goes through long periods (we are now talking about months in terms of size and complexity of the piece) in which humidity and temperature have to be controlled at all times. The method of working, indeed, lacks the spontaneity and immediacy but precisely because the actual concept or, at least, conceptualisation of the drawing is vanquished.

S. S. In this exhibition (just like in other works you have created) the support of the drawing loses its light weight and becomes present, it gains a body, matter, gravity. Likewise, the exhibition room, the place that works as a neutral space — like a white cube—, becomes saturated in a way in which it could be said that nothing can appear in it. However, the title, as much as the pieces we can find in that space (that resemble the articulations of the human body, but also the mediation that constitutes the paper between what is thought and what is drawn), makes us think about an opening position or transformation. Is there a social space for change in art and in thought?

L. M. I am absolutely convinced of that. The survival of the artistic experience to the constant crises and perpetrated attempts of murder, for the last century by artists and theorists, through its reduction to axiom, to the filing cabinet, to the absurd, to nothingness, makes it clearly obvious. I understand art as an intrinsic need of the human being that makes us worthy of our species. In a world –human world– which many times seems destined to self-destruction, the presence of culture, art and thought appear to be, perhaps, the only stronghold where human action leads towards an analysis of what we are, making us complex by circumstances that delimit our frame of action. This is a space where we do not owe ourselves any more than the need to *be*, capable of interpellating us directly so as to shake us sometimes, go through us other times or give us a place where we can build a possibility for real change.

Pensar el final compromete el final considers precisely that possibility. The title directly alludes to the contingency of an end that is given to us as the only one, as

predetermined, but at the same time it opens a possibility of change which needs to go through a process of thinking. This way, upon the reflection there is an ability of transformation which, within art, has to go through the creative process. Consequently, what I suggest –and do– is redraw the actual exhibition room, replacing it, rotate its entire architectural structure with the intention of questioning its veracity, creating a new inside-out and going a little bit further, aiming to point out its condition of basic structure of a building that is a powerful symbolic space, as main quarters of important cultural structures, among other public town libraries. My action, therefore, implies redrawing an entire simulation of acceptances of truth in a process that, obviously, also questions the actual concept of drawing. With a clear intention to tense a space that normally works as a support –firstly neutral and white– in its relation to the cultural constructions that occupy it and the people within it, I suggest again its limits with the intention of drawing a new space, stage, context, where not only the articulation of those possibilities exist but also its perception. I began this project over two years ago so as to enquire into the difficulties of the condition of the concept of reality in a time in which we are conceived, more as time goes by, as a determined group of data, in order to continue now, being consequent, questioning the actual structure in the interest of a change, because if “thinking about the end compromises the end but not the world”, we can only make an attempt that will help us draw a new possible outcome.

S. S. You talk about new outcomes and about a questioning of the structures that shape the present. However, I like that delicate fragment of *Las andanzas del impresor Zollinger* by Pablo D'Ors that you include in this catalogue. It is a praise to a job well done, to the humanity that exists in crafting and in manual labour against a society turned into bureaucracy where only numbers seem to matter. In your opinion, thinking about the end would take us back, at least somehow, to tradition?

It would, in art's case, as art is crafted and if that is a return to tradition then so be it. D'Ors writes a beautiful approximation to a very particular way of being within society,

a way of behaving before and within work in an extremely conscious way, turning the exquisite and rigid gesture of stamping into a new possible reality. After a careless and sloppy predecessor, Zollinger is capable of concentrating his world to distil it, little by little, in the action of stamping an infinite number of times every day. Pot, pot, pot, poc, pot, poc... This way he makes possible the creation of a new constellation of what is real, capable of humanising and injecting enthusiasm, as you rightly said, to the most alienating and anonymous life, simply using a stamp, ink and paper. And although this can only happen with concentration, by paying attention to every part of the being – physical and intellectual– in every specific move, the truth is that it is only possible through the actual act of stamping, and you need hands to do that. Hands are responsible for the physical action of creating, of materialising a work of art –in my case a drawing–, they are what make the language of art possible in any one of its extensions. This is why they are vital, because they reflect transforming and modifying their own space of action so as to affect the space of whoever sees, whoever reads, through the creation of an experience. Zollinger achieves this in a modest way, almost imperceptibly. I would like to be like him, somehow.