

Thinking Colours Conference
Perception, Translation and Representation
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Faculty of Human Sciences, Catholic University of Portugal
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Biography:

Pedro Calapez is a visual artist. He was born in Lisbon (1953) where he lives and works. His work involves architecturally inspired images, installations and videos, but he is best known for abstract works compounded groups of wall-mounted aluminium panels of variable sizes and thicknesses painted with broad brushstrokes of colourful acrylics. He began taking part in exhibitions in the seventies and in 1982 had his first solo exhibition.

He has exhibited his work individually in various galleries and museums, such as *Petit jardin et paysage*, Salpêtrière Chapel, Paris (1993); *Memória involuntária*, Chiado Museum, Lisbon (1996); *Campo de Sombras*, Pilar i Joan Miró Foundation, Majorca (1997); *Selected works 1992-2004*, Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon (2004); *pisó zero*, CGAC - Galicia Contemporary Art Centre, Santiago de Compostela (2005); *Gymnasium*, Carpe Diem, Lisboa (2012). Most outstanding among the various collective exhibitions in which he has taken part are the biennials of Venice (1986) and S.Paulo (1987 and 1991) and the exhibitions: *Perspectives*, Marne-La-Vallée Contemporary Art Centre (1994); *Tage Der Dunkelheit Und Des Lichts*, Bonn Art Museum (1999); *Beaufort Outside - Inside*, Contemporary Art Triennial, PMMK Museum, Ostende (2006), *Smell Colour*, Arts Santa Monica, Barcelona (2011).

Title: On Colour
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ON COLOUR

If all artwork depends on how the artist uses materials to challenge an observer, colour takes a special importance in the painter's practice. Painting constantly forces the artist to make choices, acts of acceptance or refusal, sometimes made on a non-rational basis, it can be so compulsive that working with colours switches to working with black and white without any apparent reason. Rejecting previous lines of work, rethinking tradition and what was done before is always present in the artist's practice. The moments that the artist applies paint and the ones in which he observes the painted surfaces succeed each other continuously, revealing long periods of intensive work. In this process a special moment occurs: the artist stops and does not continue working; going on would no longer make sense. The gesture is present manifesting itself in the way the paint drips, but other factors such as the fluidity of the paints and colours, juxtaposition or the form and fragmentation of the support and its display are also crucial. The work is finally looked at as if the painter is no longer a painter, having transformed himself in nothing more than a spectator.

Recent works

My work has to do with the gaze, how you stare, how you understand the time the eye takes to scrutinize a surface filled with lines and colours. It has to do with memory and traditions of procedures, it tries to understand the surrounding space and what constitutes that space and its interaction with a spectator. It has to do with distance and proximity, with fragmentation and re-composition, with the relationship of detail with the whole. It deals with the autonomy of the gesture, with the way the hand acts, with the physical act of making a painting, with the smooth and the textured, with the empty and the full, and with the equilibrium and the instability. My work has to do with identification and with the capacity of discovery; it continually questions the representation of reality.

Colour, Fragmentation and Volume

Fragmentation is one of the practices I follow in my work. It is a way to discuss detail and the whole. To reconnect the fragments also reveals productive procedures. Paint escapes through the holes on the support creating discontinuities on the surface.

In relation to fragmentation ideas and adding volume, I have developed a series of works titled “Composições” (Compositions, 2004, *Fig. 1*) in which different panels have different depths. The volumetric challenge is clearly present. The painting offers the viewer different approaches depending on the distance and angle from which the work is seen. The lateral surfaces have mirror capacities and a visual colourful continuity is created when a group of panels is seen sideways. The use of very strong colours alternated with smooth and mysterious transitions demands the gaze of the viewer to move continuously in different directions. Observing the panels as a detail or seeing them integrated in a group also reveal different aspects of the work.



Fig 1. Composição #26, 2004, 169,5 x 211,5 x 41 cm

Colour makes an intense statement on my recent works. However, colour does not define itself by a simple or complicated game. Neither does it do so by the use of its contrasts nor by the metaphoric

possibilities it carries. The act of painting and the role of colour in painting are primordially revealed by the interaction with a gaze, the gaze of a spectator. This gaze is the source of the feelings that arise in the relationships promoted by what is seen and it will make that the spectator meditates on reality, on the weight reality has on him and the relation he builds with others. Art is a political act. It goes beyond simple distraction or entertainment. Colour is artwork differentiating itself from formal type questions that inevitably emanate from colour's own materiality. There are different levels of interpretation in a painting that depend on the different usages of colour and shape.

Artwork should be as open as possible. Several different and varied interpretations of it may not yet be on the artist's process as in fact his work starts from paints, media and inspiration to which usually logic processing does not apply. To discuss what one sees requires time and space from the gaze and the discussion about colour, an activity necessarily reductive of reality, is currently structured by eminently formal aspects. In fact, the best way to begin to discuss colour is to refer to how a paint tube is opened, squeezing it until the thick or liquid paint spreads in front of our eyes and hands.

Colour and Supports

Another one of the recent trends in my work has to do with the limits of the support. Traditionally the support is canvas, a rectangular piece of strong cloth stretched over a wooden structure. In his book *Della Pittura*, Léon Battista Alberti described this rectangular surface for the first time as a window:

“On the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen.” (Alberti in Bartlett 2011, 167)

But the painting may have a non-uniform structure. The four borderlines, the limits of the traditional structure, can be distorted in different ways: deforming edges, mixing surfaces in different depths, or even fragmenting the support and experimenting with different materials. And of course, great care and thought on how paint flows and reacts to these deformations has to be taken. These are issues important to my work and myself.

An important work related to my exploration of support limits is “piso

zero” (ground floor, 2004, *Fig. 2*) that was created for my exhibition at the Galician Centre for Contemporary Art (CGAC) in Santiago de Compostela, 2004.

“*pisos zero*” is a ground piece, a painting laid on the floor. The 66 acrylic painted aluminium plates fit together revealing the way they were cut in reference to a previous drawing. The resemblances to an island, a map, or just a slab of dried mud as a consequence of climatic changes, pose some of the possible meanings of this work. The drawing was made based on Siza Vieira’s architectural drawings for the CGAC. However, the physical appearance of this work transcends any programmatic principles making it an autonomous work of art. The drawing is the result of the superimposition of the different floors, mixing all the rooms and corridors. It is as if the collapse of all floors of a building would define a new plant from the ruin of what was before a perfect building. My hand redrew these lines in a freehand style, roughly following the more intense lines. This work reveals a deregulated territory, a new continent raised from destruction. And nevertheless it is a painting; a painting seen from above while you can also go around it.



Fig. 2. pisos zero, 2004, 350 x 700 x 31 cm

The objective was to start in a reverse direction of the final architectural creation. It is like trying to discover the wanderings of the architect’s pencil before tracing what needs to be drawn in order to fulfil an imposed program. Through the gaze’s distortion over a constructed universe I reached the reference starting point of my work. The process

flows from an end to a beginning, from an exterior look to an intimate way of seeing in order to forget all functionalities, overlap lines, mix dimensions, distort the visible, and redraw a space as a sum of different parts, filling the cut parts with thick paint, overlapping the chosen colours creating a cut coloured ground from a rigorous architecture.

In recent works from 2005 to 2010 I have explored different actions related to the supports that have had direct implications on the colour painting process. Crucial for the visual result is for example the effect of colour bands that continue within a painting from fragment to fragment such as in “RW 04” (2008, *Fig. 3*).



Fig 3. RW 04, 2008, 300 x 400 x 5 cm

By the deformation of a rectangle different shapes were obtained sometimes with a wavy movement. Moreover, a hidden signification may

exist when shaping such paintings. For example the “Badges” series (2010) departed from drawings of real badges and coats of arms, reshaped and redrawn with the aid of the computer. In the work “Mod 02” (2007) all the aluminium parts get their dimensions following the Golden Rule from an exercise proposed in “Modulor” (Le Corbusier, 1943). Then this level of signification is turned over by the presence of colour. Deforming an aluminium plate is also a process of disturbing the regularity of painting. The visual aspect becomes different whether the support is painted before or after being distorted. Working with computer software to systematize changes in for example a simple rectangle results in a dialogue between wavy movements and straight patches of colours.

A more challenging situation is the association of supports of contrasting shapes and their grouping. Notions as stability and continuity of form are questioned. Colours function then as the magnetic tension that group the different shapes.

Process of Colour Painting

Thinking about colour processing, the following quotes can be considered:

“Take a blue in the fold of the mantle, an ultramarine from afar, a soft violet, a harsh yellow, a running red, a disturbed raw Sienna, an ochre on the edge of the door, a magic emerald, a smoke black...” (Calapez 2008)

“To us art is an adventure into an unknown world, which can be explored only by those willing to take the risks.” (Rothko, M., Gottlieb, A., and Newman, B. 1943. Wikiquote 2012)

“I did have the desire that the painting be asymmetrical and that it create a space different from any I had ever done, sort of-off balance. It was only after I had built up the main body of red that the problem of color became crucial, when the only colors that would work were yellow and blue.” (Newman 1990, 192)

When painting a colour, another colour can be superimposed over the first one or settle next to it, touching it right at the edges. Processing these choices building the painting palm by palm is an attempt to foresee results in the progressive filling of the colour. The way a painting is made does not follow a pattern. I just as much start at the top as at the bottom or from left to right as vice versa or paint group by group of adjacent panels, opposing colour patches within the total surface of the set. Placing a

colour next to another produces a scale of interactions: a scale of relationships between colours, a scale of correspondences with my gaze.

Establishing colour scales, an issue that has concerned painters throughout the history of painting in an attempt to systematize the pictorial process, does not take place without contradictions. This is evident in the intuitive choices made by artists.

“Where the eye sees at the same time two contiguous colours, they will appear as dissimilar as possible, both in their optical composition and in the height of their tone” (Chevreul in Gage 1999, 173)

I start by choosing all the colours that the paint manufacturers provide. I lay the respective pots of paint out on my work table, grouping them together according to a possible palette of colours: I establish a scale among the colours that I intend to use first and their opposite colours, not in the optical sense or as a chromatic circle, but by subjective, intuitive associations. Black and white are next to each other, allowing swift mixtures in the correction of luminosity. Sometimes at the beginning I limit the number of colours to be used. On occasion I have chosen just two colours and those could be just black and white. The intermediate tones appear during the mixing, obtaining a certain hue at a specific intensity, or they happen during the physical mixture on the surface of the painting where the *dégradés* (colour gradients) proliferate through the dragging of the paint. Dimensions, form and distance determine the choice of the colours. The process of painting flows, irregularly cut through by moments of contemplation in which, as a spectator, I feel the multiple chromatics present. Retouching and repainting are equated. The process is repeated with the end being determined in the glance of the certifying gaze.

“And what is good about a picture is never ideological but always factual”
(Richter in Obrist 1995, 165)

I am dealing with a concrete problem: to put colours, forms and volumes to function. What visual dimension might a set of colours, limited by the surfaces that hold them, further take on in the eyes of the viewer? Might it still be possible to claim importance for the gaze? Is the gaze a part of feeling? Colours and forms are not only this. Something emanates from their physical presence. The way they appear and are structured is determined in their making, a determining part of the process of painting.
(Fig. 4)



Fig. 4. Barreira C, 2012, 225 x 71 x 4 cm

“Generally speaking, colour is a power which directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.” (free translation for this paper from French, Kandinsky 1969, 89)

The colours hover before me shifting like clouds in a sky swift with wind. They drag themselves over each other, here fusing in and there scraping at each other. They contrast each other; they promote unexpected games. I spoke of Kandinsky, Chevreur, Richter, Newman and I could refer to many others such as Goethe, Arnheim, Itten, but something always remains to be said. The space of colours is variable and ambiguous, not explanatory or affirmative. It equally easily allows one to speak of politics as of love, as of nothing. Speaking of nothing, better, speaking about emptiness is still a possibility, perhaps the last possibility to communicate.

The place of communication and contemplation shifts. Images

continue to exist beyond what they may illustrate. They establish a world with a vitality of its own in which discussion of reality is a lesser issue. Revealing colour, reminding one of its existence, is only possible in the physical empathy of its intrinsic nature.

Early Works

However, I have not always used colour in the way outlined above. In my 1991-1995 works, slight tonal differences and surface texture aside, colour is uniform: black, red or orange, brown or greenish. It works as an ocean, a continuous support where white lines, in fact scratches on the surface, make their apparition revealing a drawing.

Colour Uniformity

“muro contra muro” (wall against wall, 1994, *Fig. 5*) is a good example in which the colour use is uniform. The work is a corridor, a passage device. The work’s 18 panels are painted in two tones of red. The panels are displayed in a way that a small dislocation is created by their side-by-side setting. The two walls conceive a visual movement, as there is a discontinuity on every other panel. As the lighter red succeeds the darker one, there is also a colour discontinuity.

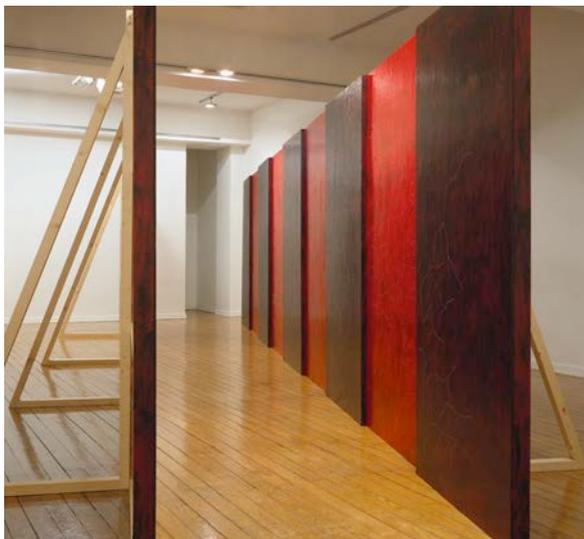


Fig. 5. muro contra muro, 1994, 240 x 1000 x 180 cm

The colour “madder red lacquer” is for me an ambiguous colour; warm blood and a cold threat, therefore taking us into unimagined depths.

The objective is the creation of the spectator’s path in this corridor that absorbs and confronts him, envisioning the surface scratches that reveal interior views and partially finished walls or even ruins.

“At a certain point the wall ended and Marcovaldo found himself leaning against the top of a pillar; no, it hadn’t ended. It made a right angle and continued. Thus, along the forked angles and pillars Marcovaldo’s path followed an irregular course; how many times did he think that the wall was about to end, only to discover that it continued in another direction; in the middle of these bends and curves, he no longer knew which way he had turned, or rather, at which point he should jump down to get to the street. Jump... and if the difference in level had risen? He perched himself on top of a pillar and peered down below, from one side to the other, but not a single ray of light was able to penetrate the bottom: it could have been anything from a small leap of two meters to an abyss. His only choice was to continue along the top” (free translation for this paper from Portuguese, Calvino 1994, 48)

“Wall against wall” came into being with my arms stretched open. The blades that I held firmly in my hands touched the two surfaces simultaneously. When one hand scored the paint on one surface, the other hand immediately imitated the gesture on the opposite side. I started again. Now it was the right hand that took up the initiative and the left that responded. In this way the drawing began to emerge.

The two hands challenged each other, comparing each other through the drawings they have carved. The uneven symmetries contemplate each other in the task of searching for the place. Something more is being offered in the space that divides them.

While the work starts to appear, my mind wanders in contemplation. How does a space come into being? Could it be the association of place linked to repetition, to symmetry?

For each drawing there is another, made before, from another. A mirror is also used for symmetry. And for each space or object drawn, another one exists, not exactly symmetrical but reflecting it.

An interior is drawn, the interior of a palace, of a house, walls - some made of ice, others not - a cave, a path in a canyon, an exploding window, staircases that draw back and come forward, that sink or elevate, something that falls in the water, a row of columns, a suitcase that opens.

One day the gaze recalls the day before. When the hand gently fondles the door's post, the tabletop, the edge of the bed. Thinking about other doors, tables, bedrooms, houses, the gaze roams, searching for other moments. The repetition of the gesture certifies the continuous gaze.

Changes

The uniformly coloured backgrounds found in my works from 1991 to 1995 start to change with the exhibitions “memória involuntária” (involuntary memory, 1996) and “campo de sombras” (field of shadows, 1997). This change is clearer in the second exhibition in which exuberant and contrasting colours arise, overlapping, and mixing while still moist. The idea of fragmentation and regrouping in panel groups also arises, although it may have already been present in the discontinuities of “muro contra muro”.

”memória involuntária” is a conception of human memory in which cues encountered in everyday life evoke recollections of the past without conscious effort. In “In Search of Lost Time” (also known as “Remembrance of Things Past”), author Marcel Proust contrasts involuntary memory with voluntary memory. The latter designates memories retrieved by intelligence, referring to memories produced by putting conscious effort into remembering events, people, and places. Proust's narrator laments that such memories are inevitably partial, and do not bear the essence of the past.

“memoria involuntária” is an almost closed room with a small door, a house with only one room, the door indicating that it is possible to penetrate its interior. The door is a small, rather narrow passage, like a corridor. A controlled entrance. In the interior the walls are high, touching the ceiling of the surrounding space.

The white walls prepare my torment, demanding to be filled. I knew that the drawings I was going to do could not be openings, windows. I stand in the centre of the room and sense the images taking over the space. I no longer wish to leave. I am going to stay here.

“No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture.” (Lacan in Miller 1998, 110)

The distance between a landscape and its image: the distance between this image and my gaze. That which remains. What other landscapes can possibly be recalled when remembering an image I saw for a few seconds? What other drawings can I possibly do? Abandoning control of the hand, pursuing a line defined in the development of a memorized drawing. It is in these narrow spaces that one can work.

“Vision is not a particular way of thinking or of being in itself: it is the means I am granted to be absent from myself, to observe from within the fission of Being, only at the end of which do I close on myself.” (free translation for this paper from Portuguese, Merleau-Ponty 1969, 99)

“There is a duel between the desire to see everything, to forget nothing, and the faculty of memory that is in the habit of avidly absorbing all the colour and the silhouette, the arabesque of contour” (Baudelaire 1995)

The landscapes are there, in front of me. I have to study them to begin to draw the outlines, which reveal the gaze of the other and his other gaze.

In the repetition of the copy, at that specific moment when the eye follows the outlines and does not need to verify whether the hand accompanies it, I realize that the image that I so intimately prepared has begun to look at me. Then I close my eyes.

The departure proposal for this exhibition at Museum Chiado in Lisbon was that I had to choose works from the museum’s collection and make my work on the basis of those references. I chose the soft pastel works by Sousa Pinto (1856-1939), loose leaves of a lost sketch book of country walks: light traces of colour that meet and collide, one with another, seeming, at times, to float beyond that which they represent. I decided to observe the works at the museum’s storage. There I set up a small studio so that I could draw while seeing the original works. Drawing based on these wonderful soft pastels made me feel something special. Sousa Pinto’s landscapes as such had little meaning to me, however his use of the soft pastel and the way he overlaid the different colours took my mind back to the way I made my childhood drawings, characterized by overlapping many colours. These overlapping traces were also present in

my dark graphite drawings from 1982. Looking at these Sousa Pinto works I made a series of paintings that were cues for childhood memories, similar to the recollections in Marcel Proust's novel. But sensations merge constantly and thinking about what kind of landscapes would come out from memories of the ones I was copying, made me absorbed by the luminosity of Sousa Pinto's backgrounds and this drove me to achieve a specific change on my previous practice. Therefore, the painting series for the exhibition "memória involuntária", works titled "Parede 1", "Parede 2", "Parede 3" (Fig. 6) and "Parede 4", was made using more and much thicker paint and using different colours on different layers. When the surface was scratched to define a drawing line, the colour of this line, instead of taking the white background of the canvas, would take the colour of one of the deeper colour layers. Those memories also led me to group paintings by just putting different themes side by side and be surprised by the unexpected contrasts or discontinuities.



Fig. 6. Parede 3, 1996, 280 x 558 x 12,4 cm

How does one find what exists between each one of these outlines? Are they made up of the pigment? How do we understand what is beyond what is represented? I cannot help getting so close to the surface that everything gets out of focus. I no longer see but the colours, the lost lines thus divined are recorded in my eye just the same.

The drawings of Sousa Pinto look at me, and my eye passionately enamoured with painting stops teaching my hand.

The development of my work took a further step at the next exhibition, "campo de sombras" (field of shadows, 1997), made for the Pilar and Miró Foundation in Mallorca in 1997.

During a visit to the Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró in 1995, when I received the Pilar Juncosa and Sotheby's prize for drawing, I had the opportunity to walk around the museum and visit the two Miró studios. Something there particularly impressed me.

In the typical Mallorcan country estate house Son Boter, there is a small room that Miró used for meditation and reading with a tiny annex where he used to sometimes sit and watch the shadows coming through an opening in one of the walls.

In Miró's studio designed by architect Sert I found objects that could have been a reference to ideas or evocations of memories that Miró undoubtedly used in his work in a way known only to himself.

Miró's presence was evident right there in the room. I could see him as it were moving around his work and painting and every now and then glancing at those insignificant newspaper cuttings, packages, postcards and tiny objects that he had carefully pinned to the walls of his studio.

Then I imagined myself drawing. What could I draw if I were to take all these references as a point of departure? What images would be, and inevitably were, stuck to these objects?

They came to me as shadows, not in the sense of being the dark side of things but as being the other side, as images that although having lost something by having been lived by another person, still provoked ideas, memories, and intuitions. At that moment, those images merged into the walls of Miró's studio as if revealing his vision, which in spite of having disappeared, had not ended.

The series consists of drawings with thick red lines in oil on paper evoking the contours of some of these cuttings and drawings on Miró's wall. These references were also incorporated in a series of alkyd paintings on wood in which, following the most recent trend in my work, a thick and pasty consistency of paints was used and the drawing was carved into its surface. I composed two sets of 24 paintings in different sizes and depths. In them the carved drawings were made, not based on Miró's

drawings, but on Miró's memories. Even though they were created as individual pieces, their composition as a whole forms one very large painting in which the different details can be perceived individually. Making a painting that is the result of grouping different parts, dialoguing each other, became something new to me. (*Fig. 7*)



Fig. 7. Muro 2 (campo de sombras), 1996, 336 x 610 x various cm

The works with the underlying reference to the shadows Miró saw in his annex did not come out as dark panels but as strong and luminous paintings. Some still allude to Miró's objects as scratched drawings appear on the surface but others are completely abstract. Miró's eye, which abides so intensely in that place, is with me now, perhaps looking at me.

Miró's "Constellations" (around 1936) make one wonder about fields of stars, hence the title of my exhibition "campo de sombras" (fields of shadows).

Immersion in Colour

Standing surrounded by colour, being immersed in a colour field has

been a theme for many of my works. The fascination I had, when at art school, for colour field painters such as Rothko, Clifford Still, Barnett Newman continues and is a basic reference for many of my works and installations.

However, the idea of fields of colours also brings me to one of my first exhibitions “Azulvermelho” (Bluered) presented at Diferença Gallery in Lisbon in 1982, which was a result of collaboration with the artist Ana Léon.

For the catalogue of “Azulvermelho” we wrote that the spots invading the exhibition space on the canvas over the walls and the objects were not verbally explained. The gaze is not able to decipher the representation that is before you. The gaze will create new worlds from what the eye is seeing and simultaneously and continuously narratives will evolve.

Making artwork is not the solution for any type of problem. The “making” survives frontally as a practice and is itself in fact the only problem. What is done, the work, has a value of its own, and instigates a biunivocal relation—from the spot to the gaze and from the gaze to the spot—enlightening a border of possibilities.

One can speculate about the use of red and blue; hot and cold, close and far. However, there is no rational explanation for this choice, we just strove to create a disturbing place where strange beings, wood cut figures painted similarly to the walls, haunted the visitors.

In 2002 I went back to this idea of immersing in a painting and developed a series of works called “Contentores” (Containers, 2002-2004, *Fig. 8*).

The first of the series is “Dentro”, a cube that is open at the upper side. Each side is 1,3m and they are painted on their interior faces. To observe the painted faces the spectator has to look inside the cube. If he wants to feel the work completely he has to lean over the side to let his head go literally into the painting. The paintings are completely abstract and filled with large patches of strong colours in such a way that one cannot distinguish the cube’s sides. What is thus proposed is more than seeing inside: it is to imagine oneself being inside as if confined within a surrounding environment of intense painting, isolated and cut off from all conditions exterior to the work.



Fig. 8. Contentores, 2002-2004, each 130 x 130 x 130 cm

With this physical action the aim once more was to make the viewer more closely aware of the eye-gaze paradigm. Added to the spatiality of the work itself, it was installed in an exhibition room with a large show window giving to the sidewalk. People approached the gallery space seeing this large industrial looking object very slightly showing that there was something inside, which would only reveal itself completely if you would enter the gallery.

Spaces

Generally, I prefer to give some autonomy to the work, allowing the possibility for the work to be installed in different spaces. However, from time to time I make works for specific spaces.

In 2002, the aim of a commission was to commemorate the five hundred years of existence of the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos (Jerónimos Monastery) in Lisbon. Even though I had full freedom in my design, I decided to take into consideration the details of its location. The work “Ornamento Escondido” (Undisclosed Ornament, 2002, *Fig. 9*) hangs on a wall by the stairs leading to the upper cloister of the monastery. It is a painting made up of 24 aluminium panels, painted with acrylic, arranged in a grid. It was completed in March 2002 and is on permanent view at the

Jerónimos Monastery.

The colour of the room but also the colours of the cloister and the colours of a series of paintings depicting the life of Saint Jerome in the sacristy were taken into consideration while defining what the work would be.

For this work I chose, after several studies, to make a large view of the main cloister. It is in fact a two-frame drawing as the same image is repeated with minimum differences. Yellow and red colours answer to the cloister's stone colour, which was recently cleaned and had a smooth yellowish colour. The fresco on the room's ceiling was also orange and ochre.



Fig. 9. *Ornamento Escondido*, 2002, 545 x 505 x various cm

The text below gives an insight into my gaze and working process for this work.

On the walls of the church, certain grooves seemed to run in lines that traced arches and outlines of drawings. The blocks of stones interrupted those lines without impeding their continuity. In the dim light of the interior of the church those drawings appeared and disappeared in response to the clouds that drifted capriciously by, blocking the rays of the sun.

I began my walk through the cloister. In my mind's eye I made pictures with all the memories I could summon, including those of certain Sunday mornings when, hand in hand with my father, I strolled between these arches.

In the cloister, revolving on the spot, I gazed around a full 360°. My eye passed from detail to detail, taking in the thousands of ornaments, each merging into the next, looking the same but always different. The yellow-ochre of the stone became more intense by the contrast with the blue of the sky. Between areas of light and shade there was a continual, warm vibration.

It was impossible to stay still in this place. Wandering through the cloister is inevitable, compulsive. At one moment I wanted to watch a detail, a piece of ornamentation, then immediately I wanted to see what came next. Thus the eye proceeded, in a cinematographic sequence, moving in and out, from panorama to close-up, interleaving continuous vision with frame-by-frame. Framing is set up in the interstices of the stone blocks, testing the equilibrium between the different forms.

In the sacristy a set of medium-size paintings shows scenes from the life of Saint Jerome. My gaze alighted on one in which jagged mountains and scattered clouds stand out in the background.

On the stairs leading to the upper choir, a twin window with two stone benches defines a halfway halt. I sat down and looked out. Several planes are superimposed, silhouetted one against another, until the eye comes to rest on the outer walls of the cloister.

On the stairs leading to the upper cloister there are windows on one side only. They define rectangles whose dimensions I noted down, seeking to discern a proportional relationship.

I decided to take photographs. On several occasions I found myself in Jerónimos Monastery just to collect images that could provide a basis for drawings. I decided not to draw from life but to work with the photographs on the computer.

I began to lay down coloured backgrounds with drawings made from the views I had recorded. The results multiplied and from the 50 drawings selected I moved to as many possibilities for paintings.

I arranged the grid of aluminium panels, giving the surfaces the dimensions of the windows of the site where my work would be installed. I fine-tuned the dimensions of the panels and the background colour using projections on site. The two thicknesses of the elements of this huge painting would reveal themselves when one would move in relation to the panel.

The viewer's gaze would thus be engaged in various ways by the frontal and lateral observation that is inevitably involved in walking up and down the stairs on the site. The field of vision would also change as the eye moves towards and away from the surface of the painting as the viewer walks past.

Now I could start work. Shut away in the studio I tried out colour mixes: one colour for the background; another for the line that defines the design that reveals views in the cloister; another colour for the thick superimposed line.

Conclusion

Colour takes a special importance in the painter's practice. The act of painting and the role of colour in painting are primordially revealed by the interaction with a gaze, the gaze of a spectator. This gaze is the source of the feelings that arise in the relationships promoted by what is seen and it will make that the spectator meditates on reality, on the weight reality has on him and the relation he builds with others. The best way to continue to discuss colour is again to refer to how a paint tube is opened, squeezing it until the thick or liquid paint spreads in front of our eyes and hands.

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