

Reason of the Gaze

For this exhibition in the Casa da Cerca, *Branca e neutra claridade* [White and Neutral Clarity], Calapez has decided to start chronologically at the end of the last century, with the series *Desenhos contínuos* [Continuous Drawings], from 1999. Five large-scale drawings in dry pastel on paper, which depict a sort of forest, a wood synthesised in a ballet of lines drawn out by the method of holding two sticks of pastel in the same hand. The density of the uniform black colour of the background, beyond the nocturnal, added to the different intensities emanating from the white of the pastel according to the strength with which it has been applied makes these lines – that seminal foundation of the drawing – undulate and vibrate at the same time. Indeed, they form a single view, as the lines that complete the right edge of the *Continuous Drawing 01* are the starting point for those that start on the left edge of *Continuous Drawing 02*, and the final lines of this one on the right edge lead to those on the left edge of *Continuous Drawing 03*, and so on. In this manner the static view proper to the drawing is transformed into a different dynamic, accentuated by another of the demands of the conception of the artist, which has been sufficiently fixed upon by the studious, its wandering contemplation. It is not that the spectator “sees” the wood in front of him, it is that he has to move forward into its long nine metres of, excuse the redundancy, depth.

They were shown for the first time in the exhibition *Pedro Calapez. Places of Painting*, which I had the good fortune to curate for the Burgos CAB in 2005. At the time I related them to the movement of the photograms in a black and white movie, a statement I still maintain, and to which I add that, aside from being one of the strong moments in Calapez’s production, are a great example of that confluence between the traditional discipline and the subversion of its mediums, which, I believe, makes his work unique.

If the project is followed just as it is programmed, the spectators will see them as they start their visit in the hall of the ground floor, accompanied by one of the latest works made, *Oh don’t ask why*, from the same year, a water-colour on rice paper of a similar or larger size than the *Continuous Drawings*, which allows one to gauge the coherence in the changes that have taken place over the last decade, and even further, in the quarter of a century that has gone by since he broke onto the public scene.

Oh don't ask why is in fact a triptych of images contained on a single sheet, which indicates an interrupted continuity between them and which form, like so many other works of his, a place, the modulated diction of a space. The only colours are yellow and a diluted black which at times tends towards grey and to a certain dissolving of the pigment in the wash. The figures are as slightly outlined as usual, the lines of definition are as clear as ever, but others that form, so to speak, the atmosphere or the climate of the space, fly with greater freedom than any previous one; there is even, on the left panel, one that is a pure game of the paintbrush and had, a dance existing only in the rhythmic and pulsing gliding of the liquid over the paper, which speaks of the artist's pleasure in doing it, at the same time as it speaks of an implicit connection with practices of experience or of spirituality like, to quote a contemporary who has always been close to him, that of Brice Marden.

It shows, also, and with them we come back to the chronological origins of the exhibition, the *Studies Works of the Gaze*, from 2000, and two works from the *Studies Works of the Composed Gaze*, from the following year, 2001, although each group will hang separately.

Although insistence may tire those who have followed his career, there is no other way but to reiterate something that is already known: Calapez's main concern and interest as an artist is to scrutinise the act of looking, an analysis and a study that have led him to configure a whole battery of methods and manners of approaching both the places and objects that may be represented – including the works of art that were born out of other hands – in order to elucidate the effects and consequences of each of these forms of appropriation, as well as the different distortions, alterations and transformations to which they might be subjected by the new technologies, and also, finally, to establish what the formal mechanisms are through which the motifs may be invented.

Six sets made up of a total of thirty-four works forms the first series of the *Studies Works of the Gaze*, which bring together particular views of landscapes or of domestic and public interiors, with neither a relationship of continuity or of propriety among them, but which construct a certain harmonious view of their representations. I may state that in this case the rhythm of the gaze – differently to what happens with the *Continuous Drawings*, which are based on the displaced continuity of the lines – is here established according to the colour. And in the same way that one cannot state anything about Calapez if one ignores his obsession for the gaze and its

implications, neither can one say anything if one for one second disdains his colourist capacity. It is almost a miracle that he has reconciled, in the way he has done, the two basic elements of the art of painting, colour and line, without the power of either one of them overcoming the other one.

Sunny oranges, different more or less luminous ranges of blue, tilled earths, cereal and earth yellows, reds that are more dimmed than bloody, smouldering blacks ... Set out in such a way that three blues might appear together on the same line, or the blacks enter into dialogue with the yellows, or the latter with the damp earths ... An arrangement that, in two other cases, the groupings of twenty works each that he called *Studies Works of the Gaze. Series A* and *Studies Works of the Gaze. Series B*, is made even more obvious through the blue-earths binomial that alternates both horizontally and vertically. The *Series B* is allowed the luxury of placing, in the second row of the fourth line, a bright yellow work that makes the dominant colours “leap out”.

In the same way that the confrontation, in the *Studies Works of the Composed Gaze*, on a single sheet of paper, divided by its median, with semi-abstract coloured forms and defined lines, although proud of their manual shaking, clearly shows the evocative and sentimental role that it plays in relation to the prosody of realistic staging.

Mysteries

If not a special mention, the twenty drawings in the *Mysteries* deserve an independent mention both due to their origin, the public commission for a centre of Catholic pilgrimage, and due to their formulation, figurative drawings, using the line and extreme simplicity, which, at first sight, may seem more than odd in Calapez's work.

In the first place we notice that this extremely important work, the making of the main door and the twenty panels with the Mysteries of the Rosary for the entrance of the new church of Fátima, a work by the Greek architect Alexandre Tombazis, is not by any means Calapez's first work devoted to the religious field.

In 2002, the Hieronymite Monastery in Lisbon, on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of its construction, commissioned the two huge works that form *Undisclosed Ornament*, the preparatory sketches for which particularly relied

upon the use of the computer, and, in 2005, he installed in the chapel of Nossa Senhora das Neves, in Ílhavo, one of his aluminium works in coloured shapes on the side walls of the presbytery and a crown of thorns on the high altar.

He had previously carried out several showings in inactive ecclesiastical spaces, the works for which were specially conceived for the surroundings. These are, together with the sculptor Rui Sanches, those of the Convent of St Francis, in Beja, in 1990, and that of the Chapelle de Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière, in Paris, in 1993.

The twenty sketches, completed in 2007, do not correspond exactly to the twenty bronze plaques carried out in the same year, and the sketches for the door, if they exist, are not exhibited; however, they are an exceptional opportunity to get to know the most intimate aspect of Calapez's method.

The images are not invented, or at least not all of them, as they come from fragments, from paintings or drawings by the proto-renaissance and renaissance old masters. An incursion into the history of art that has been usual in his work since the mid-eighties, which has allowed him to dialogue with Giotto, Fra Angélico, Piranesi, Tiepolo, José Julio de Sousa Pinto, Joan Miró... On this occasion the latter himself quotes Fra Angélico, Giotto, Simone Martini, Masaccio and Mantegna.

These originals were put onto the computer and over them, on the computer, Calapez made his sketches, reducing the motifs to a detail or feature, one which provides a graphic synthesis which is as absolute as it is expressive. Only the line, thicker rather than thin, composes and structures the figures against the neutral background of the paper. Let it be understood that they are not lines that are figurative in themselves, but rather abstract, vigorous and buoyant at the same time, which establish the scene as they summarise it in pure rhythm.

One example from each of the series suffices. In the Joyful mysteries, *The Presentation in the Temple* is a succession of imperfect ovals on the outside of which we can make out a hand, and in the centre of which the person of the Christ child is no more than an insinuation that is more felt than noticed. In the Mysteries of Light, *The Transfiguration* manages to make the figures a pure elevated trembling in which all the agitation is in the dozen lines which are enough for him to incarnate the event. In the Sorrowful mysteries, the *Crucifixion and Death* is almost exclusively set on the feet of Christ on the base of the cross, and in a more schematic manner on the hand of the bad thief, who appears in the right corner.

Finally, in the Glorious mysteries, *The Crowning of the Virgin* shows the crown through three ornaments held in a hand, while the vault of heaven is closed in three circles over an arc of circumference.

In the sketches the neutrality of the empty surrounding is as important as the sinuousness and liveliness of the lines. As if in that manner the details and features would achieve a greater and more fluid presence.

If I am seeking an antecedent for them, I find it in the series of drawings *Fields of Shadows*, from 1996, motifs extracted from newspaper cuttings, photographs, postcards, etc., when not drawings by the artist himself, on the walls of Joan Miró's studio in Son Boter, in Majorca. The former works, produced with red oil pastel on paper, are more clearly figurative than the latter, but there is a certain logic in the energy and efficiency of the line per se that makes them similar. And also something deeper, of a personal content. I am convinced that Calapez has dealt with the two works in the same manner. If *Field of Shadows* are "my lines made from 'the Miró's Memories', not from his drawings and images", in the artist's own words. The *Mysteries*, and the door itself, are his lines made from the universal Memory of a faith and a belief, not only its drawings or images.

Plans

Personally, the set that is most original for me in the selection chosen for this exhibition is *Plans*, from 2007. I in no way disdain the extraordinary panorama that is formed by the series *Incomplete Narrative* (2001), *Where to Rest* (2003), *Four Woods* (2006), *A Day in the Life of* (2006) and other loose drawings, which demonstrate Calapez's versatility and the different solutions he achieves according to the different issues posed to him. However, in my view *Plans* proposes sketching with colour. In a certain sense it is totally opposite to the drawings in the *Mysteries*, and even to other works we have described and analysed; here it is the colour, its ordered and at the same time broken distribution and its sustained or interrupted confrontations and dialogues that grants reason to the gaze.

They are located in an arc at the far end of which would be the Mondrian of the draughtboards – although the latter tended more towards the monochrome, at least as far as I recall – and at the closest end in terms of time, to the Gerhard Richter of the colour charts. They do not take on the symbolic or metaphysical

functions of the first, nor are as factual as the second; they remain in a state in which the formal potency is overcome by the turbulence of the contents, without them coming from any base other than that of painting.

They are worked on in more or less the same manner, although one can clearly distinguish two differentiated series. The first one distributes the space of the paper according to the usual squares or rectangles, with the treating of different colours that overflow their limits, are superimposed or stand next to each other separated only by a band between them. The second one multiplies their number and establishes them in a more ordered and consequent manner, in bands and rows, which accumulate layer of colour on layer of colour until obtaining a surface that is more harmonious, and as far as one can state this, uniform.

Because a new element is integrated into these works, more radically in the first ones: disorder, a certain entropy that leads both to a diluting of the original geometrical forms, which at times fall, dragging others down with them, at other times drag them sideways and sometimes perhaps oscillate like shapeless stains on the edges ...

This internal wearing down is what in my view makes these works, otherwise joyful in their colours, the most dramatic works that Calapez has produced over recent years. They contain no pronouncement, nor can we say that they deal with any concrete subject – there are no allusions either to landscape, or to interiors, or to objects, or to anything that is not full of colour – and yet they project a heavier air, an invitation to contemplate in them the perturbances of our gaze.

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