

The Painter's Energetic Action

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Post-modernism, with its stressing of stylistic pluralism – the profusion of artistic trends that are indifferently validated by the critical exercise – has stood as the hegemonic cultural logic of contemporaneity. The beginning of this process dates from post World War II, when the neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s put into practice the Duchampian legacy of the *readymade*, thus definitively diluting the borders between the “artistic object” and the “everyday object”. This intersecting of artistic practice with daily life thus marks out the current period, known as “post-historical” according to the philosopher Arthur C. Danto. The short circuiting of the autonomy of the “artistic object” led to the proclamation of the “end of art” during the 1970s, of which the “death of painting” is one of the exemplary vestiges.

The presence of painting in the following years and its increasing position in today's visual culture demonstrates that it has not only survived but even gained ground in relation to the other artistic disciplines. However, this dynamic did not result from a strategy of resistance that maintained the prevalent modernist dictates in the middle of the XX century, but from a reformulation of the principles of the pictorial condition themselves as a response to the demands brought about by the conceptual protocols that had in the meantime become instilled into artistic practice. It is within this framework that the notion of “painting in the expanded field” appears, a variation of the thesis held by the historian Rosalind Krauss, who at the end of the 1970s examined modern sculpture through the expression “expanded field”.

Krauss stated that “categories like sculpture and painting have been kneaded and stretched and twisted in an extraordinary demonstration of elasticity, a display of the way a cultural term can be extended to include just about anything.” Thus it was necessary to understand the genealogy of the artistic practice that had ended up in this state of things, which Kraus did by analysing the condition of sculpture. She explains that artistic practice questioned the monumental dimension of sculpture and that as a consequence it evolved in two directions, through which it was fused with architecture and the environment, instances which until then had been very different from it, a distinction which granted it its specificity.

Something very similar took place in painting, with it exploring properties that until then had been outside the condition of the pictorial, among which were the articulation between the support and the surface, volume and relationships of colour in the built space, besides a questioning of the politics of display and of the discourse around them that were emerging at the time. These characteristics are detected in the artistic practice of Pedro Calapez, who since the mid-1970s has built a language within the scope of the “expanded field”. There are many works that illustrate this, but it suffices to quote some of them in order for one to understand the continuous exhaustion of the modernist pictorial condition that Calapez protagonises. For example, the series of “furrowed drawings” based on cuts in wood, a technique that evokes

engraving; installations like *muro contra muro* [Wall against Wall] (1994); or the group of “painting containers”, open cubes with, among others, urban motifs inside them.

muro contra muro exemplifies a comment made by the critic Mariano Navarro, who drew attention to the crossing of formal questions with problems of a social nature in Calapez’s artistic practice. The work consists of 18 large scale rectangular structures laid out vertically facing each other and with the supporting wall brackets on view, the alignment of which creates a narrow corridor; on the other hand, although they are monochromes, these panels contain images, each one inspired by strips from the classic comic strips *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, by Windsor McCay (published in the New York Herald from 1905 to 1911), which proposed an alternative universe of a fantastic nature. For Navarro, one therefore notes in Calapez the “interchange between the creation of domains of his own through painting and the appropriation of or dialogue with contexts of an architectural nature seen as pictorial representations”.

Works like *Coat of Arms* and the series *Topographic Charts*, both from 2009, introduce a new procedural scheme. Here, as in other recent works, Calapez cuts out aluminium plates with a jet of water, marking out shapes that were previously made digitally and which were inspired by photographs and other imagery – the artist’s image bank. The use of this material is enough in itself to evoke industrial production, with its mass-produced dimension – among other aspects of a mechanical kind – shifting Calapez’s artistic practice into anti-auratic terrains – in line with minimalist premises, for example. After this phase, Calapez applies acrylic paint to these elements in a treatment that refers back to what the historian Mion Kwon coined as a *site-oriented* artistic practice, the fruit of a “chain of meanings constructed by the artist’s decisions”, including his bodily movement during the creative act. This desacralises the painter’s gesture even further, in the sense that the concept has replaced the brushstroke and the matter deposited on the support metaphorically enunciates the role played by the hand.

Each one of the titles of those works indicates Calapez’s framework: on the one hand the heraldic and the signifying complexity associated to it; on the other hand, geography and territory, words with a military stamp that evoke issues such as imperialism and the post-colonial view of the world. Attached to the wall as a floating device, and laid out according to a pre-determined diagram, the works reflect each other both through the patterns that they configure and the chromatic singularity they show, as well as through the theoretical references they convoke. With an interpretational scheme governed by retro design and atmospheres of a utopian nature, along with varied ideological landscapes, these works encapsulate the ties woven by Calapez between his artistic practice and pressing subject matters of today.

This circumstance is also the case in a work from 2011, *24 Badges*. This is a set of 24 circular pieces with multiple outlines that remind one of cogs or cosmic explosions, and the abstract quality of which, albeit inscribed within personal expression, transmits feelings shared by the collective, which operate on the level of the subconscious or according to a community potential.

Equally from this year, *Ácido* [Acid] renews Calapez's interest in architecture while being maintained over the societal premises of *24 Badges*. As is understood in a statement made by Calapez himself, the architectural condition has always marked his thought. Referring to "pizo zero" [Ground Zero], an exhibition held in 2005 at the CGAC, in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, Calapez stated that its title "intends to reveal (...) the connection to space, the space of the house, the space travelled and observed – a confrontation with the built space." In this work, remission to architecture comes from the support on which the acrylic paint is applied, made up of ceramic bricks, and essential material – ontological even – in civil construction.

The built space is also the referent in *Half-pipe* (2011). This term designates the structure used in radical sports, particularly of an urban nature, in which the setting is the street and which generates its own subculture. The work consists of two concave, inverted cycloids aluminium plates on which Calapez applied acrylic paint in several different tones, both pure and mixed, juxtaposing backgrounds and colour fields that generate intense visual contrasts to the point of almost eliding the pictorial plane. The work invites the viewer to interact with it, moving around it and trying out different viewpoints as in the case of a phenomenological experience. The viewer thus imagines adolescents who take their skateboards on a sunny afternoon and perform *kickflips*, among other acrobatic tricks, as if their movement would reflect the chromatic vibration of the work or the artist's energetic action in making it.