

RAFAEL LAFUENTE

KONPOSAKETAK / COMPOSICIONES

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Rafael Lafuente (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 1936–2005) explored what it means to make paintings over a fifty-year period. He worked with series to develop a pure geometric language as part of an ongoing process of eliminating iconic references and formal purification. Colour – in its prominence – line, plane composition as well as pictorial techniques and various formats were not elements to be mastered, but partners with which to establish a working relationship, accountable for the strength and the result of the work. Lafuente thus maintained this open dialogue throughout his career through constant research and experimentation with techniques, media, means and formats that tied his work to the development of a language and artistic discourse connecting him with the research undertaken by international currents. Respected and supported by his contemporaries, his independence, discipline and consistency served as a model for a younger generation.

The exhibition presents a set of works produced from the 1960s onwards until his final pieces, dated shortly before his death. Organised chronologically, the project has selected the paintings that most explicitly exemplify his processes of formal purification while simultaneously maintaining an undeniable emotional quality. *Konposaketak / Composiciones* also deals with his work processes by incorporating projects, drawings and experimental practices in different media to complete an

extensive and complex profile of the artist's creative personality, many of which are being shown for the first time.

Alongside emblematic works from the Artium Museoa Collection, the bulk of the exhibition comes from the artist's own studio, a collection of documents and works that have been recovered and carefully conserved and catalogued by the painter's family. From his earliest works, Rafael Lafuente pursued independent research, far removed from the tastes and narratives of the time in a discourse that challenged painting carried out in his own context and time. His works were the result of a self-taught process of enquiry and discovery, confronting his own limits in his search for *accuracy and harmony*. A process that translates into a constantly evolving body of work, collected in countless notes on his colour tests, spatial organisations, series of shapes, sizes and finishes...

The temporal reading that is usually made of his work, leading him from the material expressionism of his early works, his incursion into graphic art, organic figuration, pop art, to constructive logic and geometric abstraction, is also intersected by the production of drawings, optical games paintings on mirrors, compositions on mobile panels, watercolours, gouaches and sculpture projects or public murals.

Enrique Martínez Goikoetxea

HARMONICS

(dialogues with the works and notes in Rafael Lafuente's studio)

Our understanding fails to grasp the continuity of this whole – just as it fails to perceive those formless rags of space that separate known objects and fill in the random intervals between; just as it loses myriads of facts at every moment, beyond the small number of those evoked by speech.

(Paul Valéry: writings on Leonardo)



Back and front of canvas. 1952

Unrepeatable, each present contains the latency of its predecessors and successors in a suspensive series in which neither origin nor destination matters, but instead the continuity of the series. The work of an artist, once completed, is a continuum. Not because it confirms a sustained homogeneity in the course of his/her career, but because all the small or large discontinuities between works emerge as determinations of a sequence to which predecessor and successor works equally belong: from budding childish outlines to unfinished works, and all sketches of his/her formative period, the exploration of predecessors, the rehearsals of representation, the hesitations of fascination, the deliberations of style, the developments of settling, the consolidations, the variations of orientation, the evolutions and mutations, the shifts, the flowing back, the affirmations and reaffirmations, the decisive works, the criticisms, the acknowledgement of present, the intuition of future. This forms an extremely rich oeuvre in a lifetime of work. Each of these works will choose its viewer. So beyond the fate of the works within the uncertain universe of public recognition and fluctuations of the value of taste,

of their incorporation into one or another discourse of historical or cultural legitimacy, none of the works must have been superfluous. What the discourses ensure is a congruent narrative, but not a narrative adapted to its own legitimacy, or even an inner congruence of the sequence of works. From a storyline perspective, it is easy to decide the one that acts most representatively, in the sense of several recognisable works in their historical register. An account of discoveries and patents is thus obtained under the principle of evolutionary progress, leaving out anything that might disturb the clear, distinct nature of the discourse. Each author can end up simplified in a line, in an exaggerated statement, according to which the work of splendour that identifies him/her is preceded by mere propitiatory antecedents, followed by epigonic works that lack the intensity of the tense moment of discovery and the maturity of confirmation... as if the formal logic of historical periods and life sequence should be confirmed for each author: childhood, maturity and decay, archaicism, classicism and mannerism...¹

Each work regresses to the moments of its creation, intermingled with the emotions and circumstances in which life and art are indistinguishable

1 From Wölfflin to Calabrese, from Focillón to d'Ors, from Sarduy to Greenberg, attributing an inner logic to the advances of languages according to a timeless model must only have been a formalist fantasy.

ble, although forming part of a unique full life experience of its endeavour. Only the author undergoes the experience of the overall contemplation of his/her entire oeuvre. An intuition of the whole can only be glimpsed from the outside based on partial elements. In the continuous series of what has been achieved in a lifetime, each work operates as a discontinuity that is relative to the distinguishing feature with regard to the linearity of the series. Each work will have affirmed its moment, an additional element constituting an infinitesimal authorial deliberation. For this reason, to contemplate the entire oeuvre of an artist, even in an imaginary manner, is a privilege that encodes his/her untimely modern adventure, orphaned from a fertile environment, vigorously discreet, solitarily social.

*Borderland between solitude and
community.*
(Kafka)

I. STRUCTURAL CONFLICTS

Style for each author is delving into a knowledge of complexity, a cognitive artifice for tackling the real that can only be recognised retroactively. Each generation, and each author, is confronted in each circumstance with modes of complexity in the real for which – technical, stylistic, symbolic – inheritances are not fully acceptable or adequate. Neither self-taught innocence nor academic training can protect one from this lack of resources. Each

*I must have a body because there's
something obscure inside of me.*

(G. Deleuze: The Fold)

moment demands a special approach. The strength attributed to solutions provided by one tradition or another is relativised both by new circumstances and by the need for generational appropriation. Nevertheless, modernity introduced a demand for adapting to time – in fact, an overdetermination associated rather with a model of the present – provoking an ideology of time. To be in time becomes a categorical imperative that surpasses any tradition in its power of conviction, so that, having itself become tradition, it acquires a self-immune authority.

The complexities for the painter are not those inherent in scientific research in the understanding of the real, but instead the complexities inherent in a cognitive fluidity that does not dispense with variables or interactions, whose analysis does not avoid the lack of neutrality of the cognising subject in the cognitive operation. The painter may be fascinated by the formulas and theorems of the mathematician, but he/she admires clarity and distinction in these diagrams and demonstrations, and recognises the same impulse of understanding. But the painter does not aspire to empirical knowledge, or to an explanation of what the world is like: what he/she stubbornly offers is a proposition located at the irreducible gnoseological uniqueness of the subject, thus revealing the fundamental aporia of human knowledge by confronting it with its blind spot, in which

the fantasy of an observation without an observer diminishes. Nonetheless, the capacity for prediction and production developed by this subjective elusion has placed technoscience in an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent position. Since the inauguration of experimental sciences, Western cultures have reorganised a universe of knowledge within which the arts have been relieved of any epistemological commitment, in accordance with the categorical construction of the philosophy of art, in turn a subsidiary branch of the new philosophy of science. Artists have since then been subsumed in the intensity of a tension between the cultural stimulation of their expressive needs, in accordance with romantic principles, and the cultural inhibition of their gnoseological aspirations, converted into a stimulation of academic demands. On the one hand, a principle of unlimited freedom against any coercion or system and, on the other hand, a complementary principle of rationalisation and integrity.

Order-dis-order (ataxia-a-taxia); the mode of evil will be limited to this negative prefix.
(F. Jullien: *The Shadow on the Picture*)

Each model of order implies a tension between what is considered superfluous and what is considered essential, between components and opponents. Our – psychic, social, technical, categorical or aesthetic – configurations and organisations testify to this structural conflict, either through an effort to suppress the inconvenient or through an attempt at appropriation or domes-

tication. All art forms belong to this anthropological function of ornament as an operation related to the problematicity of the structure. The ornamental function would have to be related to this administrating of access and belonging to the structure, to the turbulent relationship between the opposing components of a structure. Iconic ornamentation captures the conflict metaphorically; aniconic ornamentation displaces it metonymically, like a containment that delays access. Iconic representation would act as an exorcism against that which is represented; plastic ornamentation would act as an impediment that contains and suppresses whatever remains outside the representation.

Both systems have complemented each other, even when they have become mutually exclusive terms of an elective polarity: between advocates of rationalist purification that suppresses all that is deemed inessential, advocating an existentialist catharsis that intensifies an extensive, inclusive staging of all forms of complexity. On the one hand, the formalist conviction that empirical literalism would free the human spirit from the coerciveness of symbolism, metaphor, representation, psychic phantasmagoria and the tragic sense of existence... On the other hand, the existentialist conviction that psychic and social complexities are metabolised and resolved when expressed. On the one hand, an ideological norm exemplified in

There is no such thing as a harmless remedy. [...] In disturbing the normal and natural progress of the illness, the pharmakon is thus the enemy of the living in general, whether healthy or sick. One must bear this in mind, and Plato invites us to do so, when writing is proposed as a pharmakon.
(J. Derrida: *Dissemination*)

[203] within all great art there is a WILD animal: tamed. [...] all great art has primitive human drives as its ground bass.
(L. Wittgenstein: *Aphorisms*, 1940)

They said also that this king [Sesostris] divided the land among all Egyptians so as to give each one a quadrangle of equal size and to draw from each his revenues, by imposing a tax to be levied yearly. But every one from whose part the river tore away anything, had to go to him and notify what had happened. He then sent the overseers, who had to measure out by how much the land had become smaller, in order that the owner might pay on what was left, in proportion to the entire tax imposed. In this way, it appears to me, geometry originated, which passed thence to Hellas.
(Herodotus)

a formal, material constraint. On the other hand, a methodological containment that is exemplified in emotional, symbolic expression. Between the reality of the concrete and the humanity of the emotional, between norm and expression, between law and theatre, between living matter and crystallisation.

But neither the expression of trauma nor the representation of tragedy, nor the imposture of a seamless harmony, nor the staging of equilibrium, nor catharsis or asceticism eliminates the complexity of the real nature of the subject, intersected by its symbolic registers. No attempt at order will ever abolish human complexity. Attempts to turn the human into a citizen are limited by the persistence of what is insoluble in sociality, the indomitable background against which the psychic depth of the *anthropos* rests. Civilising impulses create models of order and harmony, but they can neither be imposed nor inherited, so that each generation is constantly confronted with an ever more complex civilising challenge the greater the degree of artifice – laws, devices, mechanisms, organisms, institutions... Neither symbols nor knowledge, nor consciousness, nor ethics fully restrain the psychosocial dysfunctions of the *anthropos*.

The very impulse to eliminate disorder is simultaneously an indication of the disorders from which it emerges. Civilisation does not purge barbarism, in the same way as civilis-

ing ideals become all the more wild the more they become indisputable principles, with their application in programmes for rationalising existence ultimately displacing and even catalysing the wild, stimulating that which it seeks to prevent.

I.1 The part for the whole (an exclusive abstraction).

*The conversion of real pain into the
fiction of power.*
(Elaine Scarry: *The Body in Pain*)

Abstraction is a basic cognitive process inherent in the complexity of human intelligence. The ability to identify underlying patterns, to create symbolic systems of correspondence between disparate phenomena, is an indispensable tool for artistic elaboration. The extraction and formalisation of structural, geometric and morphological patterns allows for their extensive use in any functional context once they have been made independent. Such independence and functionality have turned abstraction into the formalising, technical mechanism par excellence.

*There is no abstract art. [...] Neither
is there figurative and non-figurative
art. All things appear to us in the
shape of forms. Even in metaphysics
ideas are expressed by forms.*
[...] *A figure, an object,
a circle, are "forms".*
(P. Picasso)

The processes of abstraction have played an extremely important role in developing human knowledge, especially all forms of art. And there is certainly an art recognisable as abstract, recognisable by a certain kind of iconography based on the deliberate suppression of the repertoire of natural forms, of recognisable forms in the visual world, on the disjunction of plastic, iconic factors.

*The abstract work [...] is one in which
not the slightest suggestion
of an image is voluntarily accepted
by the artist.*
(Michel Seuphor)

Art recognised as abstract will have paradoxically been developed at the junction between the figurative representation of all processes of formalisation and technical seriality – as an aesthetic of industrialisation – and the sublime representation of liberating the human – of naturalism, ordinariness, anecdotes, symbolism, evidence, of the “all too human”. For both technique and metaphysics, the particular, the natural, the concrete, the circumstantial, that which is attached to the earth and to life, that entire world of sensations, appearances, textures, forms, colours, details, desires and the like will become suspicious and problematic from gazes that aspire precisely to intellectual neutrality, to Cartesian clarity, to normativity and technical adequacy, to the avoidance of the shadows of the human, to the exclusion of shadows in the painting.

*Let us imagine “artist” God: he would
need to handle all those shadow
games to make him stand out.*
(F. Jullien: *The Shadow on the Picture*)

This analytical decomposition would reveal the structure by discriminating its constituent elements. Although by simultaneously reducing the works to minimal elements, a perceptive, expressive, symbolic essentialisation is presupposed, whereby attention would be concentrated on each element, regardless of the cancelled continuity of a “whole”.

*Chanting the square deific, out of
the One advancing, out of the sides;
out of the old and new – out of the
square entirely divine, solid, four-
sided, (all the sides needed)... from
this side Jehovah am I.*
(W. Whitman)

The decomposition and segregation of decontextualised elements, which substitute the whole for the part, coincide with the exaltation of these

Behind the mask of humanism there exists not the truths of materialism but the nightmare scenarios of logic and determinism. There emerges a crystalline world responsive only to numerical imperatives, formal manipulation, and financial control. [...] Where once geometry provided a sign of stability, order, and proportion, today it offers an array of shifting signifiers and images of confinement and deterrence.

(P. Halley)

fragments, converting them into empty signs, as figures of an absent, and therefore, indisputable whole. Thus, signs exempt from any human reference, similar to ornamental art, coincide with their super-human evocation, similar to religious art: alienation in formalisation and fetishisation in sublimity. The notion of abstraction as suppression is glimpsed in this double negativity, of several “parts without whole”, and a “whole without parts”. This form of abstraction undoubtedly produces an epistemic cut that is all the more convincing the greater the expectation of totality it arouses, as well as all the more powerful the more resolute its colonial design of universality.

I.2 The whole in the part (an inclusive concretisation).

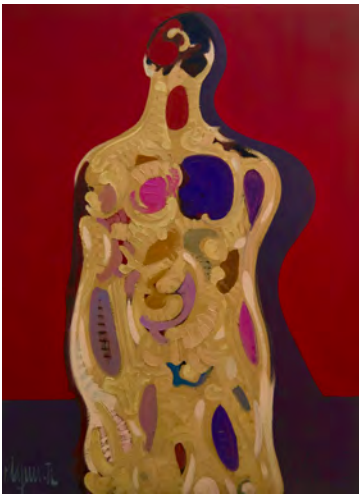
Language, especially the mathematical language of science, creates boundaries between black and white. Common sense blurs them. Reason works with greys. [...] When white becomes black, some say: “it is essentially the same”. Others instead, when the colour darkens somewhat, say: “it has changed completely”.

(L. Wittgenstein: *Aphorisms*)

Simplicity is inversely proportional to precision. The psychosocial complexity of the subject is the essential core of all its actions and relationships. This centrality of the human in art is not confined to the anthropomorphic image, but instead extends into the relations it maintains with that of which it is a part. So-called artistic “genres” are the iconographic fields displaying the three dimensions of the anthropological space: relations with other humans (portraits, genre art, political art), relations with the environment – non-human, non-personal beings (landscape, still



Rafael Lafuente.
Figura atrapada en un jardín. 1969



Rafael Lafuente.
Ornamento de una figura. 1964

life, concrete art, literalism), and relations between humans and beings – non-human but indeed personal beings – (religious art, sublime art, etc.). In fact, works of art do not always conform to this division. They instead act simultaneously in a triple articulation that makes them co-present, interchangeable, undecidable: a butterfly can be a human body, a person two, a flower a face, a piece of furniture a guest..

The representation of the human body (statistically the main motif of universal art) in its vast diversity has been a basic tactic in the anthropological establishment both in local terms – as a strategy for implanting and shaping regional, epochal identities associated with distinctions of class, gender, culture, etc. – and in general terms – as a strategy of identifying species that must have founded an interminable anthropocentrism – because the representation of the human body identifies as its correlate the natural, non-human space. The presence of the human body is irremediably implicative, provoking in humans an immediate chain of physical and emotional reactions; it has therefore been the vehicle for all manner of content and identification. This implicative force helped anthropomorphism to become a founding system of legitimacy (based on accepting iconographic evidence) and a system of proportions that modelled not only certain anatomical ethics, but also the social body

and its class structure, the pulsional hierarchy of rationality, as well as a complete model of knowledge. This canonical anthropomorphism must have been the anthropic model par excellence, like a "structural a priori".

But the body is not primary; it is not a datum of the experience that we think we know, but an effect of the complexities of knowledge, consciousness and representation, like a discontinuous structure, dislocated, split by cuts and anomalies.

As an inverted reflection of these discontinuities of the mortal body – its vulnerability, its caducity, its fragility, its physiological and psychic instability, its sexual, racial, cultural singularity – the phantasmatic remedy of a political fable will be registered in the model of the integral, impassive, independent, rational, generic, inorganic, unnatural, even incorporeal classical body.

As an exemplary representation of the proscribed, or as a spontaneous expression or return of the repressed, the discontinuous body, visible everywhere in universal art, is the irreparably altered, unique, excessive, defective body of expressionism and pictorial existentialism. The bodily background that underlies any essay of style, the subjective *anomaly* in which all essays of order are contemplated, for which they issue the instructions of a repair, a normalisation, an illusion of

The diabolic body would be characterised by its: (a) structural disintegration (a porous, hollowed-out, internally discontinuous body – with parts, attributes or elements of heteroclitic origin, without solution of continuity, disproportionate and open; (b) dependence (a body in continuity with the outside, and with others); (c) organicity (displaying all manner of intracorporeal life, demonstrating its metabolism and any other organic interiority, including of course all those related to sexuality and gestation, etc.); (d) pulsionalidad (a psychically complex body revealing its unconscious, and all outbursts of passion, without necessarily being associated with social meanings).

(J. L. Moraza: *El inconsciente clásico* [The Classical Unconscious])



Rafael Lafuente. *Abismo rojo*. 1967

stability and equilibrium.

With regard to the existential tension between the presence of the body and the commitments of abstract essentialisation, between human existence and the development of its technical, symbolic devices, the transition from figuration to pictorial abstraction, as a properly existentialist interval, would coincide with the intuition of a progressive dehumanisation of art that would affect not only the aniconic nature of geometry and the absence of anthropomorphism, but also the weakening of humanism or, to be more precise, the imposture of humanism on the human.

Metamorphoses in the works of a painter refer to the tension between the body and space, and even more specifically between the complexity of the subject and its environmental adaptation. From paintings such as *Ornamento de una figura* [Ornament of a Figure] (1964) or *Ornamento de mujer* [Ornament of a Woman] (1963), the expression becomes more existential of a pulsional body, and it is even more explicit in *Abismo rojo* [Red Abyss] (1967), in which the representation of a human body internally split by an animal abyss coincides with a body externally dissolved in space. There is therefore a continuous transition from the progressively more “generic” anthropomorphic representations of the late 1960s, such as *Figura sobre caballo rojo* [Figure on a Red Horse] (1967), *Figura cerrada sobre sí misma* [Figure Closed in on Itself] (1969), or



Rafael Lafuente. *Figuras en su decorado*.
1969

*There will be representation as long
as there is a figure on a background.*
(Alberto Molemborg)

Figura traspasando otro espacio [Figure Passing Through Another Space] (1969), to the “abstract” paintings of the early 1970s. They not only act to examine the dissolution between figure and background, but also as a gradual metamorphosis of anthropomorphism in its aniconic concreteness.

This metamorphosis had already been consummated in the works of 1975 in a radical, irreversible manner.

As even the most generic anthropomorphic signs fade away, subsumed in space, the space acquires a singularity like a figure of space. And the relations between body and place are transformed into relations between the parts of space. The human project of geometrisation is applied to the formalisation of the human.²

At first, the subject gradually dissolves into its circumstance; secondly, that circumstance becomes the essence, the absence of the subject.

This is not a substitution or an elective split between figurative naturalism and abstraction, between naturalism and rationalism, between existentialism

2 The emergence and development of the social sciences presuppose the state of the *anthropos* in place of the “object of knowledge”, thus formulated as a formula susceptible to a geometry, to a rationalisation of human complexity, to a crystallisation of emotion... In fact, the human is the final, definitive continent of the colonial exploration of the rational impulse...

If I am classified as a geometrical painter, it is because my planes or paintings recall basic geometrical shapes and I use straight lines, but these shapes for me are only plastic forms; they could be human figures, men and women, or anything else. I do not paint geometry. I am neither a mathematician nor a geometer. I use these rigid forms as compositional elements and as emotional receptacles of colour in all its fullness and strength. When I work, I neither possess nor desire any intention of expressing emotions in my paintings. I work like a researcher in his laboratory. From constructivism, plasticism, etc., my work has a very distant relationship or kinship, as I did not commence from these isms but from the human figure, the simplification and synthesising of which has led me to these works that are totally and purely abstract.

(Rafael Lafuente)

and structuralism, but an integration between complexity and organisation, between expression and containment, between instinct and intelligence, between jouissance and desire, between the animal and the human, between the subject and the citizen... Whether as a vaccine, as a disguise, or as a weapon, these artistic forms, even in their most apparently abstract, call for a resistance to the unconscious self-constriction of the human.

The processes of elaboration surpass categories, expectations and stylistic registers. Even when aesthetic intention is applied to a constraint, the act of painting exceeds the programme. As if suppression fails to eliminate complexity, but instead adds to it the very event of exclusion. Thus, even in the vortex of a crystalline order, something of the real of the subject becomes present, something of the unthinkable totality of non-contradiction. From detailed perception, concretion will not be a form of geometrical purification, but a symbolic condensation: it will not be an expressive extirpation, or a geometrical essentialisation, but an emotional intensification. It becomes less of an abstract rationalisation, or a minimisation of the exteriority of the logos, and even less a repression of emotional factors. Neither is it an abstract ontology, nor a logic of fractional segregation. It is rather a

[1950] Mozart took refuge (without neglecting his inferno) on the joyous side, for the most part. Whoever does not understand this might confuse him with the crystalline type. [1951...] Abstraction. The cool Romanticism of this style without pathos is unheard of. The more horrible this world (as today, for instance), the more abstract our art, whereas a happy world brings forth an art of the here and now. [...] Thus, I am "abstract with memories".

(P. Klee)

concrete existentialism, an aesthetic of probability referring to the degree to which the whole is contained in the part. It is the blurriness of non-contradiction, which helps us to understand the concurrence of concreteness and uncertainty.

Only in this way, reducing the degree of representational (or descriptive) specialisation enables a high degree of symbolic versatility. And expressive restraint yields to emotional intensification.

When the works fail to eliminate factors, but instead condense them, a pulsional damming occurs that allows energy to be accumulated and managed. This pulsional intensification does not call for a suppression of everything that does not fit into an essential ideality. Painting is therefore a catch that integrates uncertainties under the condition of intensification.

II. EXPRESSIVE PRECISIONS

Artists do not struggle against their formal awkwardness to express their ghosts, but against their ghosts through their formal apprenticeships. It will not be a question of appeasing the sentient (pain, pleasure, anger, haste, desire, energy), swinging moods, of eliminating sentimental fluctuations (*allegro, adagio, andante, cantabile, dolce, vivace, presto, maestoso...*), and



Rafael Lafuente. *Pintura*. 1973

Inner life, its strength and its joy, is what determines form in art.

(V. Kandinsky)

Emotional hierarchies, whereby cool-headed rationality is usually deemed more reliable, objective, and professional than, say, compassion. For example, the ideal of objectivity which dominates our conception of the news or of (blind) justice, presupposes such male practice and model of emotional self-control.

(Eva Illouz: *Cold Intimacies*)

even more so the undesirable states of soul, of suppressing complicated emotional terms to reach a state of everlasting calm... But to reach a consciousness from which the fluctuations of mood are experienced as moments of the continuity and intensity of life, eluded or attended moments, dramatic instants of a solemn succession of inexcusable transitions. As if the opposite of apathy were consciousness. This awareness that reveals all emotions as manifestations of emotionality, as if to a geometry of passions,³ is therefore corresponded by the accuracy of a blurriness in which the whole lies in each part: as if passions were reciprocally included in their vast diversity, like the harmonics of an emotion that was not so much their synthesis, but their condensation.

This awareness is accompanied by a new expressive temperature, a different form of emotional correspondence. For expression is not a symptom, in the sense of an outer indication of an inner process, but a constituent construction that organises the psyche. Calm expression is therefore not necessarily a sign of inner ataraxia, but a performative formation that exorcises inner convulsion in a self-fulfilling promise. The formalising effort is surreptitiously already evidence of structural upheaval. It is reciprocally not obvious that

3 Cfr. Remo Bodei, *Geometría de las pasiones* [Geometry of the Passions] (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995).

Those impersonal, disinterested zones set outside of time, place and space, in which they rub shoulders with mathematics, poetry, the high arts and all that exists untrammelled and totally pure in the human heart and brain.

(Ozenfant and Jeanneret)

The contrary pairs.

(Heraclitus: 8)

Totality of perfect rest.

(Louis Zukofsky)

116. A certain painter lives in a period of war, famine and the like, but paints only idyllic scenes. Could it be said that the emotional states that led him to paint such pictures are not real? Real as a war. Are not such emotional states "acknowledged" later on? [...] 118.

But are the emotional states of a painter transferable to his paintings? Or can they determine his paintings?

Suppose I were in great pain and wanted to paint such a state. I could produce a self-portrait in which I wept, gesticulated and the like. In my landscape, I could paint one of those Friedrich-like mountain cemeteries, or perhaps a skull on a black background with a burnt-out candle and a wilted flower, etc. If I paint a cemetery on a grey day, I know that you will not normally find anything to laugh about.

(Salvo: *De la Pintura* [From Painting])

a convulsive expression cannot correspond to a Machiavellian intelligence. It is not that artistic expression is not inevitably underpinned by expressive sincerity, but that it is affected by the mismatch between quality and expression pertaining to the sophisticated game of human communication. Expressivity always therefore demands a subtle appreciation in these cases, an understanding of various levels of articulation.

Art is thus affirmed as a sentient refutation of the principles of identity and non-contradiction.

Even if it is not subject to a psychic naturalism, even if it cannot be sustained by accepting evidence as proof of truth, the authenticity of expression can be especially recognised in the persistent ways in which transformations develop and evolve, in a recursiveness according to which work and author reciprocally create each other. For expression is an effective action that impacts the real. Honesty in artistic expression is the correlate of this intensity maintained over time.

Rigour then does not imply rigidity, but firmness: if exactitude is a probability of measurement – and responds precisely to the pre-existence of something that has ceased to be measured to become a pattern – rigour does not imply measurement, but exigency. If ac-

We can always notice an absence in a painting [...] in front of the picture, I am elided as subject of the geometral plane. This is why the picture does not come into play in the field of representation.
(J. Lacan)

I do not wish to express absolutely anything in my works.
(Rafael Lafuente. 1990)

It can be a rational art, but with something emotional.
(Rafael Lafuente. 1990-91)

It is the poem which makes the words.
(George Oppen)

[24] Bach said that everything he achieved was the result of industry. But industry like that presupposes humility & an enormous capacity for suffering, strength then.
(L. Wittgenstein: *Aphorisms*)



Rafael Lafuente. *Pintura*. 1976

curacy responds to an ideality, rigour responds to a responsibility. Planning, the handling of categories, the conceptualisation of formal structures and the establishment of relation systems are intertwined with the warning of emotional precisions stemming from values or plastic factors.

Rigour in this case can be understood as a deliberate expressive minimisation over which an emotional intensification is prominent.

Figurative inexpression is thus precisely the opposite of indolence. As if the discourse of a voluntary inexpression were in fact the counter-discourse of the soft expressiveness of works. As if it fails to express everything that is meant to be implied without thereby ceasing to understand the author's intention, especially denying what is actually wanted to be affirmed. Framed against an aesthetic of integrating concreteness, the expression intensified in containment maintains the residual awareness of loss, the awareness of formalisation paradoxes and the persistence of the human factor. The signs of formalisation shift attention from the latent content: from the real of the subject, from its unconscious knowledge: a knowledge from art – provided by painting – in which elaboration and deliberation have converted the author.

III. PLASTIC UNCERTAINTIES

True chaos cannot be placed on the scales and remains forever imponderable and immeasurable. It would rather correspond to the centre of the scales... This being-nothingness is the non-conceptual concept of non-contradiction.
(Paul Klee: *Diaries*)

Perhaps beauty will become a feeling useless to humanity, and art something half-way between algebra and music.
(Flaubert).
(J. D. García Bacca: *Filosofía de la música*
[Philosophy of Music])

These concrete works are not symbolic; they prove the probability of representation to account for the real, or, to be even more precise, to show the real as a remainder of the symbolic operation, as that which does not manage to be fully symbolised and which recalls its real essence⁴. Inevitably unsettling and uncomfortable, deliberately resistant to evoking infinity, their strength originates from their awareness of finitude. For as the Greeks knew full well, there is nothing as fearsome as infinity, nothing as deceptive, as false, as flattering as the promise of a Whole.

Music must have been a constant model of non-figurative structure for aniconic painting. But even if explicitly “descriptive” music appears only occasionally, representational content appears in it, either through rhythmic patterns that model the omnipresence of rhythmic systems in natural and psychic nature, or through timbre textures whose articulation lead to structural dialogues. Sequences, intervals, derivations and articulations, even musical structures themselves, are underlain by representational patterns whose activity

4 *Lo real como resto de la operación simbólica* [the real as the remnant of the symbolic operation]. Vicente Mira. *Sobre el deseo y su objeto* [On Desire and Its Object] (Madrid: Colegio de psicoanálisis, 2001).

In the second movement of Beethoven's Pastorale Symphony (Ex. 68a), the sound of the murmuring brook is illustrated by the flowing movement of the accompaniment. Ex. 68b, the Magic Fire Music from Wagner's Die Walküre, expresses musically the flickering flames. With an equally rich movement, Smetana describes the source of the River Moldau (Ex. 68c). Bach's St. Matthew Passion is rich in illustrative passages. Among them, particularly striking because it appears in a recitative, is the description of the rending of the curtain (Ex. 68d). The swing of the weathervane is depicted in Schubert's The Weathervane, and characteristically enough, the trills in m. 4 and 5 represent its creaking (Ex. 68e).

In composing even the smallest exercises, the student should never fail to keep in mind a special character. A poem, a story, a play or a moving picture may provide the stimulus to express definite moods. (Schoenberg: Fundamentals of Musical Composition)

and intensity are responsible for their expressive effects. As if painting had been an underlying model of the imaginary background for music. The emotional intensity of music and painting would then derive from an implicative domain arising from the evocative power of plastic elements, enabled solely by the latency of symbolic, iconic backgrounds that underlie them and also possess their own logic. Detailed attention to structural elements helps to explain the intricacies of their evocative power, as occurs when examining a poetic text. An examination of thematic structure similarly allows us to reciprocally understand the technical or structural devices that support it. But music is not a model of structural abstraction for painting, but rather of emotional intensification in which (without naturalistic "evidences") dramatic particularities follow one after the other, confirming a containment of the whole in each part, a containment of complexity in the uniqueness of the work. It refers not to transcendentalism or essentialism, but to emotional concentration, with a perceptive intensification that administers sensitivity and receptivity to the structure.

Although series are developed as conjectural intent – a system of variables delimiting the operative field to generate a deductive, intuitive system – each work rehearses a partial resolution, an

*I have learnt more from painters
than I have from composers.*
(E. Satie)

*Galileo well-worn dictum is already
a classic: "[the universe] is written in
mathematical language". Seemingly
from the natural senses – eyes,
hands, feet– the universe is written
in colours, sounds, heats, weights...
[...] Let us then distinguish verbally
between real (r) and real of truth
(r2), between real (r) and in reality of
truth (r2).*
(J. D. García Bacca. *Filosofía de la música*
[Philosophy of Music])

autonomous equation with respect to the succession of which it forms part. Insofar as it is offered as completed, each work is deliberate and unique in its singularity in the series; it acquires an autonomy. They are not justified solely in the congruence of their series, in the logic of their intention, but in the singular concreteness of each one of them. Each concrete work is more important than the sequence that makes it possible. Each part, each detail, each small inflection of each concrete work contains the work, just as the work contains to some degree the sequence of the sequence. For the parts are rather participations. They are not fractions, but harmonics modulating the whole, providing it with its particular consistency. This is not merely a compositional relationship, but a constitutive function of attributions and distributions.

These partitions are explained as harmonics. When we listen to a sound produced by a musical instrument, we are in fact listening to a multiplicity of sounds that form a harmonic series.⁵

5 In wave mechanics, a harmonic is the result of a series of variations suitably accommodated in a range or frequency of emission, called information packet or fundamental. These packages form a cycle that, properly received, supplies its receiver with information on how its system can offer an order capable of endowing the medium in which it expresses its properties of a harmony. The harmonic, therefore, is dependent on a variation or carrier wave. And the fundamental vibration of each musical tone is also called the first harmonic as it is generally accompanied by other minor vibrations divided into 2, 3, 4, 5 or more equal parts.



Rafael Lafuente. *Pintura*. 1985

And when we contemplate a colour, we are contemplating a multiplicity of colours that form a harmonic series.

Harmonics reveal the inner structure of a vibration, but in doing so they also unfold a series of frequencies we cannot hear, except under certain conditions. In fact, in sonic terms, these partitions are the structural basis of musical intervals, and in chromatic terms, they are the structural basis of harmonic concordance systems. The synaesthetic nature of cognition explains the links between the chromatic chords of painting (complementarity, equidistance, adjacency and so on) and the chromatic scales of music (which include the nuances stemming from the partitions of tones into semitones, quarter tones and so on). Musical and visual harmonies counter-reciprocally instrumentalise the logic of structure by intermingling it with factors stemming from human intelligence, emotions, categories, correspondences and the like. They integrate the deterministic rational background of magnitudes with the probabilistic irrational background of spontaneities⁶, between the rationality of the *logos* [1] (square) with the irrationality of the *alogos* [$\sqrt{2}$] (hypotenuse). Concreteness demonstrates the works as conjectures rather than as laws.

6 Cfr. J. D. García Bacca. *Filosofía de la música* [Philosophy of Music]. Barcelona: Anthropos, 1990).

Bekker is not entirely wrong when he remarks that the Bb major Sonata [of Beethoven] and the Diabelli Variations are in the end unplayable, as though written for an instrument that never existed and never will; that both these works work not with real sound but with incorporeal, purely cerebral tonal abstractions [...].
(E. Bloch: *The Philosophy of Music*)

It is generally true that when two or more pure tones that are harmonics of the same root note are played, the ear adds to the root note many of its harmonics.
(Jeans)

The real sound vibration of a piano key vibrates a string that corresponds to the same note on a nearby piano. But harmonics also reveal the differential between the empirical physicality of sound and the real variability of acoustics (tied to the Indo-European root **keu*, it refers to what is heard and felt, what is observed).

Colour is surely the most alien to discourse, in which what appears does not most fluently coincide with what is. Colour has a demonstrative value of the difference between what it is – a transversal vibration of the electromagnetic field with a frequency between 400 and 800 million oscillations – and what is perceived – a visible universe of chromatic sensations. The chromatic universe imposes its uncertainty on the logic of knowledge. Hence, its structural importance in modern art. Ever since the scientific illusions of an “objective colour”, between Runge and Seurat, between Kuipers and Max Bill, chromatic codifications, psychoneurological analyses and anthropological diversity have only confirmed the lack of univocal correspondences between real factors (r_2) and chromatic sensations (r), the inanity of a universal distribution of the chromatic spectrum and its optical, chemical or symbolic hierarchies, and ultimately the lack of proportion between the real of our evidence and the real of truth. Colour reveals itself as



Rafael Lafuente. *Sin título*. 2004

a disruptor of any universalistic fickleness. Chromatic blindness, metameric colours (displaying a dysfunction between spectral composition and physical nature) and impossible colours (undecidable colours that integrate opposites, such as a “bluish yellow” or a “reddish green”, perceived only under specific conditions) affirm the intuition of a ductile chromaticity.

A type of painting that is sensitive to this disruption, to a tertiary, sophisticated chromaticity, the opposite of a basic, primal palette or a system of harmonies predetermined by psychologicistic systems. It will therefore be a spectrum of transitions and chromatic inflections, filled with tones completely alien to the primal and the basic: colours of transition, of commisure, of discontinuity, tertiary, crepuscular, auroral, transitional (catastrophic), relative and correlative... Perplexing harmonies and chromatic turbulences that are only visible in the contained state of the interior of paintings.

*Blank and motionless
preciously,
pale and hieratic
like a double request.*

(E. Satie, performance notes for the score
of *Le fils des étoiles*)

This experimental chromatic existentialism explores the forms of concreteness. For colour is an expansive centre for form, just as form is a limit of colour. It is a reciprocal containment. The chromaticity of uncertainty is accompanied by forms of uncertainty. Painting is a (vertical) action in the (horizontal) space of contemplation. The concreteness stems

*A slightly sour, tart or bitter taste
is more pleasing than sugar;
shadows enhance colours and even
a dissonance where harmony is to be
given relief.*
(Leibniz)

*The opposite elevated to what is in
itself (in Greece), or the non-abstract
and indissoluble opposites (in China).*
(F. Jullien: *The Shadow on the Picture*)

*Lyricism is the development
of an exclamation.*
(Paul Valéry)



Rafael Lafuente. *Pintura. 1992*

from the specificity of the space, and of the support, becoming present as a virtual figure of the picture plane, but rather as a material determination given beforehand, as a physical literalness on which the matter is subsumed in the real of contemplation.

The systematic recourse to conventional geometric supports shifts attention from their own outer configuration and their relationship with real space to concentrate on the operations of inner attribution and distribution. On specifying the format, the partitions intensify the off-centring, dislocations, inflections and indeterminations, both morphological and chromatic. Even apparently simple figures, or multiplied forced angles, asymmetries in symmetries or symmetries in asymmetries, cuts and planes that cut and interpenetrate each other through sharp or imprecise transitions, all these demand a perceptive verification; the event of the work is a meeting of events that occur and are mutually accepted. Emotional fluctuations and intensities will therefore persist even in the absence of the human figure, in sensitive structures.

These concretions will be the factors that make themselves present in explicit, latent forms, from which their poetic force is derived, their capacity not to be circumscribed to the symbolic, functional programmes of the everyday. Poetic work is a model of concentration

The element most grossly omitted from treatises on harmony up to the present is the element of time.

[...] A sound of any pitch, or any combination of such sounds, may be followed by a sound of any other pitch, or any combination of such sounds, providing the time interval between them is properly gauged [...] The former treatises on harmony dealt with static harmony, they may have defined harmony as "simultaneous melody".

(Ezra Pound: Anthel and the Treatise on Harmony)

My thoughts come in swarms and with marvellous ease [...] Then my soul is on fire with inspiration, if however nothing occurs to distract my attention. The work grows; I keep expanding it, conceiving it more and more clearly until I have the entire composition finished in my head [...] It does not come to me successively [...] but it is in its entirety that my imagination lets me hear it.

(W.A. Mozart)



Rafael Lafuente, 2005

in which the concrete summons the scope and potential of an integral experience. It embodies the most intellectual and intensifies the depth of the experience of the most precise, the most minimal. As if each instant once again contained the present in its integrity.

Each work is an equation referring to the cadences of what is seen and what is unperceived, a harmonic that reveals a logic in the frequencies in which the singularities of style occur, the ranges of expression reciprocally containing each other retroactively or projectively. Each work is a component of force and desire, a multiple of the total of an artist's entire lifetime oeuvre. Each work is an expression of the expression that is not fully revealed. A work is only such if it hides at first glance the law of its composition and the rule of its play. Furthermore, a work remains always imperceptible, and always untranslatable, for it is prose that has an otherwise expressible purpose.

The dizzying time of intuition and the slow time of elaboration coincide. And the instantaneous, static time of the presence of the work and the inner, expanded time of contemplation coincide. The imperishable instant of the enigma is a responsibility of the gaze.

Juan Luis Moraza, 13 December 2022

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