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## Meanders and enigmas of the image / Àlex Mitrani

*Text for the exhibition catalog "pintures", 2010. Museu d'Art Modern de Tarragona. It also included at the Artnotes magazine. nº 31, february 2010, p. 34.*

*apis, bomod, pedelpe...* Are just some of the suggestive names which Diego Pujal gives his works: we do not know whether this is their title or a description of the strange objects which levitate in their centre. These unheard-of words originate from the contraction of terms which explain, by way of capricious analogies, the forms which appear in his paintings. Resorting to neologism is not gratuitous. It highlights the need to invent a language and taxonomy to identify something new and unusual. Since they are invented and unconventional terms, paradoxically, instead of defining and clarifying, they reinforce the enigma. Its precision is part of a sleight of hand which accompanies the visual challenge proposed by the artist. That things are simultaneously evident and strange is a fascinating and disturbing discovery – sinister, if we use the accepted translation of Freud's term *Unheimliche*-. For discovering the ambiguity and depth arising from the certainty and the obviousness of the visible, art is an extremely efficient tool. And art, like so many things in life, follows a meandering course.

The systematic and analytical function of much abstract art, based on certain formalistic precepts and a rigid internal logic, in accordance with the model which Clement Greenberg observed and theorised upon, could suggest the internal depletion of its possibilities. However, evidence of its consistency throughout the 20th century and the interest it has generated as a creative option for many artists in recent times refute this possibility. The narrative and ornamental tension of John Tremblay, the slightly retro elegance of Tomma Abts (2005 Turner Prize), the rhetorical futurism of Frank Nitsche or the expanded and invasive painting of Katharina Grosse are just a few examples.

The work of Diego Pujal, who has matured in his time and is maturing here and now, in our country, captures this anxiety and possesses a coherence, an originality and certain inherent qualities that make him deserving of our full attention. In the case of Pujal, one is tempted to connect it, genealogically, with that of the Dadaist Jean Arp. This would not be wholly erroneous, given the discovery of the lyricism and the regenerating vitality of form and randomness made by the Alsatian artist. However Pujal is not restricted to prolonging his biomorphic repertoire, like what occurred with a certain affectation during the second avant-garde. On the contrary, he makes specific contributions that are connected directly with the visual culture of the 21st century.

One of the key debates of our era concerns the strategies for managing visual culture. In the age of mass media and the seduction of all things virtual, knowing how we define the real, how we construct language and how we understand codes is a key issue or, at least, one of the most productive and liberating pastimes.

What is fascinating about the paintings of Pujal is that it is very difficult to describe what we are seeing and its essence. In fact, they are not images. They are things, entities: things that exist. The images aim to be the reflex of a reality susceptible to being physically seen. On the other hand, there is every

possibility of adherence over the curves and breaks in Pujal's forms in a fixed reference. What we have before us are not representations. They are existing forms in themselves,

outside the duality of physical reality and image. They belong to another existence which is difficult to define. Yet what surprise us, we reiterate, is its presence and its constitution as a being. They are nothing (or nothing clearly identifiable), yet at the same time they are undoubtedly persistent, like natural and/or artificial bodies. Paradoxically, such entities in the paintings of Pujal are possible in bidimensionality, in an ideal and imagined terrain.

In spite of their polished and technical appearance, these works are created, and more importantly conceived, by hand. Pujal starts by sketching on paper with a pencil, until he finds, through a combination of chance, formal logic and accumulated material, a form he is pleased with. It is only when it has been transferred to canvas that he determines its chromatism. Pujal's work is not based on a computer programme, so commonplace these days among painters, although he may use one at certain stages as a useful tool, for conducting scale or colour trials, for example. Consequently, the solutions he encounters are not determined by conventional computer tools and processes. It is not that employing them lacks validity in artistic terms; on the contrary, they may be of great interest. We want to stress that Pujal's work is fundamentally created with the body, with the hand, and with the intellectual processing of what can be obtained with the barest resources. The simplicity of the lines and the forms conceal an intriguing complexity. Shadows, cuts, articulations and changes of scale produce a peculiar mixture of tridimensionality and graphic symbols. It is a striking work, often luminous and dazzling with its yellows and fluorescent tones, which include extremely subtle details and gestures. For example, Pujal tends to varnish his works, but does so differently for each one, because the coating is part of the work and may contribute to its nocturnal character or provoke reflexes which make its interpretation more complex and ambiguous. At times he seems to want to concentrate our attention, at others to disperse it.

The work of Diego Pujal cannot be reduced to formalism, or to psychedelic pop, or to an ornamental drift of abstraction, although it may controversially include some of these elements. Pujal has managed to define a discourse which, rather than a style, is a manner of presenting a series of problems of an aesthetic order, stimulating the retina and the intellect. Since I first saw one of his paintings, a couple of years ago, I have been unable to forget them. I recognise them immediately, without doubt. I recognise these images, but I still have not managed to know them in detail. We will have to continue probing their surface.