
The Unfinished as an End / David Armengol

(About Diego Pujal's solo exhibition at Fidel Balaguer. March 2011)

"The book I will like to read is a novel where the coming story feels like a still confused thunder (...), a novel that conveys a messy sensation, nameless and not yet formed..." (Italo Calvino. If on a winter's night a traveler.)

Although being two different kinds of productions (on the one hand, literature, on the other, painting), there is, however, certain conceptual -even formal-likeness between the way Italo Calvino takes literary narrative and how Diego Pujal (Buenos Aires, 1971) explores de proper codes of the pictorial language. If Calvino likes to play with a narrative tension by building expectations that grow without fully developing themselves (or without the need to show that development to the reader), Pujal explores other signifying possibilities for abstract painting (not-representational at least) with a similar complicit playfulness with the receptor. A kind of invisible agreement exists in that relation, one in which, without making it explicit, without being too conscious about it, both, artist and spectator, face the enigmatic linguistic exercise of decoding something near (a more or less recognizable form), and, at the same time, far away (without a fixed meaning).

To that end, the artist uses big canvases and monochromatic backgrounds dominated by one solemn, unique and totemic form. Even better, he uses a non-form, simply sketched, amorph, organic, fleshy, and wishing to break its forced bidimensionality, incapable, as it is, to do so. This, as in the pulsing thrills of Calvino's novels, functions, on the pictorial surface, like a premonitory signifier, puzzled and ambiguous in front of something that offers itself while resists to give itself up, forever withholding its confirmation. In short, it works like a visual mystery that invites the viewer to a kind of interpretative limbo -an impossible, and an in-between position- in which the end result (the final message we are supposed to get) is mixed up by the means employed to reach it (the way to access it).

In that sense, and, although the pictorial language is the basis of the work of Diego Pujal, writing and its rules of understanding are the ultimate productive engine in his work. This is a relationship with text that the artist makes even stronger with the use of cryptic and parodic titles that take inspiration in science, mythology, and even mysticism, and that, like a key word (balna, poren, garlema, mirna, sem, or the series c.s.01, cs.02, c.s.03, unusual for its shortness), suggest an exercise of speculative narrative by which the anxious viewer is invited to fantasize with the unfinished informations that reach him or her. A strange word accompanies a strange painting. A half understood terminology accompanies a half understood form. It is, ultimately, an act of non-combative resistance to the fixed that, in opposition to the open ended (something tiring, and seen very often in abstract painting), stands up as an ironic manifest of a fragility given within the message, a message, nevertheless, voluntarily undefined, and that implies a critical exposure of the means, visual and pictorial, that the artist employs masterfully when doing his job.

For his individual exhibition at Galeria Fidel Balaguer, Diego Pujal shows a dozen recent paintings that function like the unfinished chapters of a longer

and, also, incomplete story. They are non-failing and non-succeeding attempts aimed at offering a flexible interpretation, unclassified and undefined, and driven by a search or a need for another type of non-standardized semiotics that would allow us to face and understand what is shown without going through given impositions.

In short, we can say that Diego Pujal's paintings offer us a constant questioning of his condition as a painter. His work, based on cyclical obsessions about language, and after a laborious and slow process (surprisingly closer to that one of a writer than to that one of a painter), results in large format paintings that can only give themselves as something consciously unfinished. It might be, after all, that the imperfect flexibility that his work conveys is the only honest thing that a painting practice can offer us today.