

Medium
Date/Issue

Magazine
1988 / n. 11

Publication
Author

Galeria
Mario Doctors

Ivens Machado: Trespassing Purity

Ivens Machado is one of those persons of whom you can't or you don't manage to speak evil of. This idea sprang from a conversation we held once and that kept orbiting around my head. Now, while I'm writing, it lands as a possibility of bringing closer his oeuvre and what I have to say. Who are those characters that you can speak no evil of? They are not even those, whose confluence in the externality game concentrates the adequate sense of a wishing moment – the good – nor the easily disposable ones due to an inadequacy to this same moment – the evil. To those that cannot be spoken evil of is reserved the 'lukewarm' space of eulogy. A third possibility is invented, as if they were on the borders of the meaning-desire (a certain deviation or marginality) just as boiling-hot porridge has to be tackled from the outer edges, blowing over each spoonful in order not to get burned. And, in between spoonfuls, someone cries: delicious! Such are the artists that get me going.

It's very easy to grasp the erotic, the grotesque and the search for unusual materials in Ivens Machado's oeuvre. Kudos reserved to it transit about one of them or encompass one of these ideas. Are they the internal motivation in his works or just the most immediately external film of what he's seeking for? I scanned his last exhibition in precisely five minutes in which I saw the erotic and the unusual materials. But I also exerted one of my favorite mental sports, which is memorizing the largest quantity of visual information within the shortest possible period of time. The goal is scored by the unforgotten images. I did not forget any of the 'sculptures' in the show. All made themselves clearly seen, creating a neatness of permanence on my visual remembrances. That's what got me interested: the instant production of visual remembrances. What is this magic, this chemistry that allows Ivens to produce the unforgotten? We live in a society that puts forth an almost infinite production of images. There is such an intense visual scripture, that it produces confusion instead of neatness. It's like shuffling up words, producing garbled text lines, the indistinct mass ceasing to make sense. This visually formless mass indicates an exhaustion of the codes due to an excess of information; the excess of visual stimuli. How to break up with this? How to break up with such a flow and create images that remain? One possibility was indicated by Mira Schendel when she told me of a video project in which nothing would happen, that is, she wished to set the whole series of incessant unfoldings of visual events in a 'video clip' against an image where absolutely nothing would happen. Another possibility is suggested by Leda Catunda who, when performing a 'gymnastics of the gaze' (quoting Sergio Romagnolo), dives into a wholeness of the visible, and whose work is an appropriating extension of this exhaustively déjà-vu world.

While Mira used to work with an economy of plastic mediums to enhance the effectiveness of the image (less is more), Leda works with an invigorating image appropriation to accentuate its power (more is more). These two visions have already become classic responses to the visual avalanche. But there are still other possibilities, like the one that can be made out from the plastic activity of Ivens Machado, who seeks to exceed purity. In his plastic attitude he touches both issues: purity and excess. Not to conciliate opposites, but as a result of an intelligent inter-mediation between the purity of the idea in art and the exuberance of the visual object.

Ivens's output is an inter-mediation of intelligence and it's all about it, but the plastic objectification of this idea does not go through reason's filtering. It oversteps, it exceeds the fair limits of visual purity, which is the conventional plastic translation of reason's crystalline circuit. By doing so, he jostles the exuberance of the image ('affective' emergence of the very presence of the visible object), incorporating it to his work. In fact, he executes and agency game, tracking off codes, searching for the inside-out. Indicating a constant flow where it is no longer possible to insist on the slicing-up of worldly things. Art isn't a moment – art is. Life isn't a moment – life is.

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The effectiveness in the production of instant visual remembrances lies on the subtlety of this game. The images produced by the artist are not solely circumscribed to the visually decoded limits of the unusual, the grotesque or the erotic. They are rather amoral, orphan and nomadic choices. His plastic intelligence slides on the dislocation produced by the idea and that is added to the work as idea. Thence its power: he speaks of absence indicating the presence. His glass-shard sculptures for instance are more than the 'matter' punctuation of the glass shards themselves, more than a choice motivated by the plasticity of the material. Image sharpness is conveyed through the idea of the cut and the distress. It's as if embodying, through and beyond the glass shards, the idea of the cut. There is, neatly, a conceptual movement in his output, but the plastic outcome trespasses the purity of traditional conceptual artworks; they ally themselves to the exuberance of the visible and incorporate the heavy traffic of image production. His work is built from finding purity in excess. Contrariwise to what this text could lead one to infer, I do not believe that Ivens occupies an insular position in the panorama of visual arts produced south of the Equator. I believe this is some cultural specificity that embraces even the borderline landmarks that I tried to locate in Mira Schendel and Leda Catunda. There is a yearning to fumble with materiality as the maximal external limit of the artist's inner world. Maybe we could situate there the power of 'tridimensionality' among us, which has insistently been destroying the traditional idea of sculpture and fostering the advent of a hybrid, borderline territory between painting and sculpture. The announcement of such a niche was heralded by the neo-concrete disruption (Clark/Oiticica/Pape); it remains only to be incorporated into the registry of art-historical diffusion as a possible streak through which flows the plastic specificity of this geographically marked territory.

It's in the fluidity of the unbiased gaze – immersed in an all-embracing wholeness where the subject comes undone, objectifying the resonance of his internality in the artwork – that Ivens's work flows out. His words aptly define this process and, in some way, set a foothold for a more conscious comprehensiveness of our cultural specificity: "The steady and imprecise flux known by the ancient Greeks as gonorrhea has always characterized my production, not what is known by medicine today also as blenorrea. Within the scope of an ethic-moralistic view of the art milieu and of other fields of knowledge since Antiquity, I would be letting myself be used, wasting when using what is lying around and does not belong – infidelity – to a time where pleasure flows through things purposelessly. I feel satisfied with this manner, I don't wish for the position of a 'breeder'. Paternity does not pre-occupy me, although I acknowledge its existence. I'm not circumscribed by reason or by information and I prefer the diffuse and the non-systematic. The work is essentially orphan and impotent; I do not aspire to definitive coitus."

Translated by Paulo Andrade Lemos

Originally published in Galeria magazine, no 11, São Paulo, 1988