

Still Life-Showcase-Museum-Showcase-Still Life

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The pictorial genre of Still Life -from the Dutch translation stilleven, still or quite nature- has guided the way in which we appreciate and organize everyday objects by giving them an additional value due to the simple fact of being represented. Similar to landscapes, the Still Life becomes independent from religious, historical and mythological themes during the Baroque era. At that time, the protestant reform and its preferences for secular themes and the conquest of America converged into the meeting of new cultures and natural species that convulsed the order and knowledge of Europe.

In this changing world, reality was expressed and understood in theater. Painting at the time nurtured on its logic and its elements. This is why we encounter still lifes with great frequency in architectural niches and tables as if they were small stages or behind cloths and fabrics in a clear allusion to the theatrical curtain. Still Lifes will take care of studying the textures and the light of everyday objects by granting them beauty and permanence in the case of fruits and flowers and doing as Blaise Pascal pointed out: “that objects that have no importance in daily life, become admirable through paint”. It will be in these paintings that the fruits of the conquered territories of America will be seen for the first time. It could therefore be said that the Still Life is a predecessor of cabinets of curiosities, the first link of what will become our museums.

The museums will organize in a systematic and scientific manner all of those histories, or, better said, from a European perspective: pre-histories. They will be in charge of giving them logic, temporality and value in an environment similar to the theater where the objects are exposed in front of the spectator and occupy an established role in a space that protects and isolates them.

Such theatricalization of the other extends to everything that is not “civilized”, everything that is not within the established norm. To that extent, we have become spectators of violence, disaster and the destruction of nature. But, at the same time, depending on the point of view, we are inside or outside of the museum, inside or outside the showcase, we are subjects or objects of observation.

The exhibition Still Life-Showcase-Museum-Showcase-Still Life is presented in the manner of institutional spaces, with an ordered route, following a supposed temporality where the passivity of the spectator is an essential part of the exhibition. Contemplation will not be seen as an individual action, but, returning to its etymological root, will be a “joined” experience that is known to be shared with others and evoke the supreme desire for knowledge to be one.

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