

GALERIA HEINRICH EHRHARDT

Los árboles españoles nunca mueren

Herbert Brandl

From November 13th 2021 to January 15th 2022

Los árboles españoles nunca mueren (Spanish trees never die) is the title of the sixth solo exhibition by Austrian artist Herbert Brandl in the Galeria Heinrich Ehrhardt.

The direct allusion to time and longevity demonstrates the significance that the art of bonsai has recently acquired in his painting.

The cultivation of bonsai was originally a symbol of eternity, a source of veneration and a bridge between the divine and the human.

For several decades, Brandl's work has taken nature as its main inspiration: rivers, reeds, mountains, animals and waterfalls have made way for a new series in which different types of tree almost entirely fill the surface of the canvas. For this exhibition, the artist has chosen different categories of bonsai trees and savin junipers, which he paints from memory, with no immediately obvious motif, without any photographs or clear reference to the object painted.

In this way, bonsais from his own collection, such as *Hyperion*, a cultivated sequoia resembling the tallest tree on the planet, and certain types of savin junipers native to El Hierro island, become the main motifs approached in his painting.

The savin junipers emerge from their blue backgrounds of cloudless skies, filling the painting with their entire weight and size; the bonsais, meanwhile, appear as cut-out shapes where it is the backgrounds, in this case neutral blacks, that delimit the outlines of the figures, which seem to become empty holes in which to reach out to their full extent.

Both in the background and on the surface, these 'painted' and 'cut-out' figures, those that seem to stand in front of the background and those behind it, are expressed using strokes that build the volume of the painted motif. Far from adopting an affected, 'expert' or virtuous brushwork or painting style, Brandl's strokes are form, gesture, composition and ornament at the same time, presents through the technique and theme a challenge to a certain idea of the 'amateur' and academic. It is a kind of rebellion, ironic and pure, by no means artificial or prefabricated, that fights a dominant discourse of painting associated with the concepts of gesturality or genius.

Having been one of the pioneers of the rebirth of abstraction in European painting in the late 1980s and early 90s, Brandl has abandoned cliché and constructed an imaginary world that, in terms of both the formal (with that idea of gesture, matter or surface) and the thematic (nature, painting of natural subjects, the motif or the theme of the painting), brings with it a multitude of connotations.

Dissociated from a bourgeois concept of painting, of the act of painting and also the act of looking, which in turn implies a bold notion of the theme of the painting, of what 'one paints,' of what it is that is represented on the canvas, Brandl now shows us a figure that is almost impervious to the most homogenised trends or discourses.

His oil paintings, succulent, sometimes abrupt and sometimes sensitive, as well as his works on paper and sculptures, some of which are included in *Los árboles españoles nunca mueren*, explore a conceptual approach to the rationale of the painting and its margins. His individual use of colour, ranging from unhindered intensity to analytical and subdued, reveals a pictorial structure rooted in abstraction but which at the same time, particularly in the most delirious and chromatically psychedelic phases of his work – clearly visible now in some of his pieces on paper – develops a haptic and illusionistic pictorial mass which is presented to the spectator in all its unsettling ambivalence.