

Ana Manso

Menstruum

February 29 — April 27, 2024

Lisbon

“One line placed on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions. All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex; as the waves shape themselves symmetrically from the cliff top, but to the swimmer among them are devised by steep gulfs, and foaming crests.”

*Virginia Woolf*¹

Led by a conscious being, who believes they can legitimately manipulate a series of techniques and subjects, we can understand the act of painting (by which we mean making a painting) as one of many processes of sedimentation in nature. However, what we might call a framed geochemical micro-event loses all its inherent relevance where the nature of painting emerges in the sensory phenomenon of sight. In this optical oxymoron (the painting), the settled surface is presented as inevitably diaphanous in its own opacity; the painting refuses to be simultaneously object and image – ‘a painting is a magic stone,’ as Ana Manso once said.

What we unthinkingly call ‘inspiration’ can be understood as an interior process closely connected to the spiritual world – indeed, this analogy lies in the very etymology of the word. With a high level of occultism, this connection to the ‘beyond’ can be strengthened by the figure of the medium; someone supposedly qualified to mediate between the material and the spiritual world. In this metaphysical link, the medium abandons their own self to exist, circumstantially, as a mere vehicle of a ghostly entity – the medium ‘disappears’ in the tangibility of their own body to allow the spirit to appear. (Are we ultimately the mediums of ourselves?)

In her work process, Ana Manso tries not to obey any specific programme, surrendering herself to the fluidity of continual spontaneous unions between thought and practice, mental space and physical space, as if she assumed the role of medium for the paintings she makes. She allows the paintings to materialise themselves, to ‘paint themselves’ through her interventions, during her sessions (seances) in her studio.

Menstruum is, in an alchemical context, a synonym for medium. This obsolete word can mean a solvent in which to dilute materials or a nutritious and generative serum, as well as referring directly to the menstrual cycle. Based on the semantic and etymological deconstruction of this word, Ana Manso directs the title of this exhibition, Menstruum, towards a potential objection to the dualistic and patriarchal resonances intrinsic to a certain modernist idea of the medium and its more consensual narratives.

¹ WOOLF, Virginia – To the lighthouse [1927], London: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1964, p. 182.

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From *Menstruum* – which refuses to be a medium here – the artist questions and develops various fundamental aspects of her work. Her painting feeds off a reciprocal relationship between painter and painting, a circular relationship without hierarchy that opposes a binary perspective of unilateral action, based on the thinking man's domination of nature, on the sovereignty of subject over object.

Ana Manso seeks a process of constant renewal, a cycle of full equivalence between end and start, interior and exterior, creator and work; a blurring of dualisms that is reinforced in the depth of the meanings of *menstruum*. Each painting emerges from an intertwining in which there is always something sacrificed for the appearance of (an)other, an undulating chain (push-pull) that evokes a behaviour in a permanently liquid state; a painting in lunar time. The latter, in turn, is intimately involved in female menstrual cycles and in the functioning of the tides. This is also a way to emphasise the refusal of a disincarnate understanding of painting and of the more erect ideas of pure optics.

Ana Manso seeks to explore the infinitely regenerative nature of the pictorial experience; for a painting never exists alone nor is it an end in itself – we 'repaint' it in a different way every time we look at it. Like the act of painting, seeing a painting is simultaneously an exercise of loss, given that to 'have' that painting we must be sacrificing all other possible paintings: by focusing on a certain detail, we lose all others at that moment, and if we try to see the painting as a whole, we lose its details. There is always a phantasmagorical side hovering over the painting.

In *Menstruum* – her fifth solo exhibition at Galeria Pedro Cera – Ana Manso once again presents her painting in a desecrated way, bringing together in the same installation a group of paintings of different sizes, including screen prints, murals and interventions in the architecture of the exhibition space, highlighting once again that, for her, painting is undeniably a permeable entity contaminated by the various uncertainties and subtleties of life experiences.

In her new series of paintings, contamination is also a principle inherent to the creation process, for the way it connects oil painting on canvas – in its most immaculate sense – with a series of techniques of lesser historical nobility, such as tie-dye, stamping or stencilling. In this way, Manso explores various nuances of the painting's spatial and temporal instability, applying a range of solutions to the textile surface: dyeing the forces of contortion in the support itself (tie-dye), ghostly spraying (stencil), full and instantaneous contact (stamping) and, naturally, the marks of bristles loaded with oil paint. The thin layers of paint interweave organically with each other and with the various 'intrusive' elements, on a plane of energy that insists on slipping away. We strive to see it, but the surface of the painting does not exist.

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J. M.

²Cf. ARMSTRONG, Carol – Virginia Woolf and the time of painting. In *Cézanne's gravity*. Yale University Press, 2018. p. 41-45.

³ Cf. ARASSE, Daniel - *Le Détail: Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture* [1992]. Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2009.