

DEYSON GILBERT
DCVXVI

FEBRUARY 15 - MARCH 22, 2014
OPENING: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2PM - 8PM



It is really hot, right?

Yes, really hot.

Well, I propose we begin with the basic protocol: what is the title of the exhibition and what is the plan?

The exhibition is named after the main set of presented pieces: a series of paintings and objects I developed from 2003 to 2007, and which later I began to see as a single and concluded work, named since then as *DCVXVI*.

Just like that, with that kind of wrong 'V' in the middle, right?

Yes, just like that. Apart from this set, I intend to show one or two other things. But that will be defined at the time of assemblage.

I heard you have been trying to get a horse for the exposure.

It is true. If it all works out, we will set the installation, happening, sculpture or whatever it is you'd like to call it, *Horse and two crosses*. The logistics is quite complicated, but we are trying to make it possible. Anyway, I'm not sure if it will be developed as the original project, from 2004, or if we will present a modified version of the idea.

I vaguely recall something about this work, a bizarre story about you keeping a horse in your living room (laughs)

Yes, sort of. I don't really like telling this story because people tend to turn it into poetic invention, but the truth is that it all really happened. This is what happened: one day I was going back home – a fraternity I shared with some college mates in Jd. Bonfiglioli, close to USP –, when I suddenly began to hear a distant gallop, as if a horse was coming towards me. It was about two in the morning, and I was walking completely alone in the middle of the neighborhood avenue. And it is important to remember I was not drunk or high at the time.

The fact is that the noise became louder, and suddenly, in the distance, I saw the fucking white horse running like an uncontrollable beast.

In the first seconds, like any reasonable person would, I thought maybe the whole thing was a hallucination, some flashback caused by some drug, a residue of a poorly made goetia, or whatever. (*laughs*). But it didn't take long until I realized the whole thing was much simpler: in fact there was a horse. I don't know why, but there was a fucking white horse on the loose, running by the neighborhood. Well, that was ok. What comes next is the part nobody believes in, the "Robert Redford" moment of the story (*laughs*). There we were, myself and the damn white horse, going about in symmetrically opposed directions. He was coming from the left lane, and I was walking here, by the right lane. Then the sound of the gallop of that son of a bitch became louder and louder in an absurd and hypnotic way, and then I kind of came into a weird trance, that type of calm and convincing torpor that leads us to committing the oddest sorts of craziness naturally. Well, I began to walk slowly to the yellow lane that divided the street and, to my surprise, I watched the fucking horse do the same thing. He and I were perfect aligned in the yellow lane that divided the avenue. He was running, I was walking. Then the bastard began to ride slower and slower. He slowed down, and down, and down, until we were finally facing each other. At that time, I simply raised my hand and waited. He came closer really slowly and softly placed his head under my hand. There, out of the blue.

Come on! And then the director screamed: Cut! (laughs)

Well, this is why I don't like telling this story. Nobody ever believes me (*laughs*). But those who are close to me know it is true.

And what is the deal with you keeping the horse in your house?

This is a lie. The fact is I took the horse to my house and left it in the living room. But that only lasted a few minutes. Suddenly, a hasty man came to my door and asked for his horse back. I remember I did not say a word to him. I only went in, got the horse, took it to him, then I closed the door and forgot about it.

But what if the guy hadn't come along, what would be the plan? To keep the horse in the living room?

I don't know. Obviously, I had no plan at that time.

Well, back to the exhibition, tell me a bit more about these paintings and objects of the DCVXVI installation.

Most of these pieces were created at a very specific period of time. A time when I was looking for an escape valve in painting, because of the overly bureaucratic scheme I had entered with the Anglo Saxon conceptualism, or with the conceptualoid conceptualism, as Alberto Simon would say.

You refer to pieces like Declaration of Independence, About Economy, art and Faith, and the Disassembly of praxis etc.

Yes. The problem is that at that time I already felt embarrassed by this type of production. Not because of the stupid criticism about the boredom that is part of the excessive speech, or the emptiness of the poetic experience, or stuff like that. But, more precisely, because of how greatly Argan poked all of that in *Arte e Crítica de Arte*.

Yes, that piece in which he complains about hyperrealism and conceptualism. He says that the former is practice without theory, and the latter is theory without practice.

Exactly. That observation from Argan to me was the image of rage itself. A slap on the face in relation to all of that I wished to believe about the relationship between art and the world. To me, at that time, this comment alone seemed to eviscerate all of the contradictory and schizophrenic content that laid quietly in the artistic production since the 1960s. Without finding an exit, I ended up embracing the retarded exercise of diving into the schizophrenia of it. From this moment on, I think my production was divided into two independent arms. On one side, the more closed and Apollonian pieces, typical from the projective heads and the butt cheeks that liked seats and chairs; on the other, all of the rest that did not fit this scheme very well. Clearly, during the process, one side ended up leaking to the other, however, for a long time I didn't have the intention of putting the two of them together. Richness was exactly in keeping that distance there, just like that, in this poor manner. I let each of these sides feel haunted by the obsessor spectrum on the other side. The point was to establish and keep a sort of private cold war inside the aesthetic field, and not let any of the sides prevail without limits. I wanted to establish more of a wall than a bridge.

It means to assume the disassembly of praxis, as you called this schizophrenia in that series that related Uri Geller and his prison.

Yes. It was practically in that period that painting came up. At that time, it appeared as a sort of redoubt for an experimental practice that was contrary to the analytical and systematic rationalism of a more conceptualoid production. An indeterminate zone in which the objective was exactly to understand the functioning of specific aesthetic effects that tended to occur opposite to the institution of a speech about image or object.

Or, to give yourself the luxury of Greenbergianism and semiotics for a few hours a day. Art and therapy for an artist in crisis with his rationality (laughs).

Fuck, not so much... (laughs). However, at first, this was a bit true. However, if it were that simple, I could simply say there was an extremely pleasant relationship with all of this bullshit. However, the opposite was true. This type of posture only made the entire thing one of the most difficult parts of my job. I suffered for a long time trying to understand what was going on there. Trying to understand the functioning of those images as significant and expressive forces before the institution of a specific speech about them.

Something like understanding grammar not from speech, but from the gnashing of teeth.

Yes. In this sense, I see these pictures as essential research for all of that which I performed in other contexts, later on. They may have something of which you “*sonofabitchly*” call therapy, but in the meaning of a personal and subjective exercise. In that case, not letting the head impose itself in a totalitarian shape on the construction of the significance of a piece. However, the point was to let that happen without completely losing control, without letting the head in the guillotine whole. At least not forever. Not by accident I found my place in painting from the moment when I began using used materials: old Eucatex paper, discarded canvases, pieces of flooring, furniture and objects etc. This meant to begin a piece of work from a material that was already loaded with visual information, despite my wishes. Painting there meant from the beginning, to build something inside what was already there, given with no intention *per se*. Painting from debris and waste. My work then meant to understand the information already implanted in the support – its marks caused by time, by negligence or by the artist who abandoned it – and, from this casual order of things, to reformulate everything new in the significance of that object and my own. Painting is not about support, but painting from and for a support.

And what are these numbers we always find there?

The first number in these paintings came exactly the second time I used Eucatex as support. It came up accidentally, with the need to formally solve the image I was sketching. As soon as I put it there, I realized something strange happened. Nowadays it is stupid talking about it, but at that time it was like a major epiphany. Like talking to SAG, you know? (laughs). I realized the sign worked not only as a graphic element pushing the composition, but also as an alien and strange form to all of that. It acted not only as a formal composition point, but especially as an insisting reminder to a possible discursive syntax behind the image. It was as if each thing that needed a specific character after reinsertion felt magically resentful of a different significance, a narrative or figurative content prior to itself. A whisper of representation beyond negligence and pure abstraction.

And so what? Even if it isn't, there is nothing new to all of this shit. Think about what the surrealists and dada supporters did. Or in more peculiar cases, in the crap by Kline and Capagrossi you like so much. Not to mention all of the people who still do it, aware or unaware of it.

Yes. Yes. But the point is that at that time I was finding out these things. If we talk about the same thing over and over again, it is fucked up. We'd better stop right here. Definitely there is nothing new in none of these things (laughs).

Yes. Right. Ok. But so what? Where were you going with this?

This led me to the possibility of thinking two things at the same time. Firstly, I was interested in observing the behavior of specific signs or significant processes when these were thrown against empty or undefined syntactic contexts. Something like the empty gesture of writing in the painting by Cy Twombly, for instance. Or, if you prefer something better, the “*mene, mene, tekel, urphasin*”, in the feast by Belzzachar (laughs). From another perspective, I was equally interested in the opposite sense, the figurative-narrative restoration of the symbolic sense of abstract shapes that are theoretically pure.

Something like Mondrian's work and his relationship with the theosophical bullshit. In the case of Twombly, writing is never writing a single word, but just the opposite, the reconfiguration of calligraphy as a purely pictorial element. The painter seems to think about writing, message and sign as secondary conditions to a graphic or pictorial action. As if he said to us that every meaning is simply the successful or unsuccessful configuration of a set of actions about a specific subject. Before the prophet Daniel came in, all of the significance on that wall was pure pareidolia. And even worse, after Daniel interpreted the thing, after he interpreted the first dada poem in the history of humanity (laughs), it all seemed to continue to be pure and mere pareidolia. Well, the fact is that these things were used in the pieces of work while all of the elements were, first of all, pure visual matter resenting some empty, tired or orphan content. Before being word, number, indication, piece of geometry etc., it all should work in a purely pictorial manner over the devastated plan of supports. Only after that, in the middle of this mess, there was the attempt to reach another effect: the sensation of reappearance of significance.

What kind of significance?

I should try to find some other better example, but I will use the case of Mondrian to explain it. While it is abstract, Mondrian's painting is a structurally analogue painting to the order that rules the cosmos. The two axis, vertical and horizontal, and primary colors plus white, grey and black, come as analogue elements to the principles that create and maintain reality. That is, all of which is "pure visual" for the Greenbergian, to fucking Mondrian it was a highly symbolic syntax equivalent to the theories of theosophists who held on to the "Old Girl" skirt – as Israel Regardie liked to call Blavatsky. Finally, the neo-plasticism painting was reduced to an essential syntax, not to reach a pure shape, it did not need so much, but instead, to be restored as a type of philosophic-structural metaphor. What is at stake there is not so much the philosophy of shape, as Greenberg would have hoped, but the possibility of transubstantiation of the shape to the pure philosophical figure. Well, my idea was exactly to work from this structural premise, only inverting its sense. While the neo-plasticism scheme established its sense inside what ensured its order and cohesion, in my case, the core of the question was to give space to the shock between idea and form, to the chaos that makes it all a moveable field of significance and definition. It is the opposite perspective in relation to the theosophists: representing not the harmony of the world, but all the shit that never works out between Kether and Malkuth (laughs).

Could you exemplify that in a painting?

Maybe the most successful case in this period is obviously the "meat board". In this case, the search for the establishment of a sort of soliloquy, which goes from metaphysical digression to the comment of the painting about the painting itself and its support seems to work out. A mixture of Plato, Malevitch, Greenberg and indecorous talks with Amduscias. Something between the conceptual, the suprematism, the pop and the goetia (laughs). First, we have the support: a piece of wood that, in fact, is the seat of a chair, that is, the *place that receives and supports the human body*. On top of it, there is a flat and abstract painted figure. This thing we soon recognize, obviously, as a meat board, that is, as the object and place that *receives and uses violence on bodies*.

The point is, however, that the dark and flat color over the background turns the meat board more into an idea than into a thing. Something that moves between the mere enunciation and shadow: the silhouette of something that is both present and absent. In this sense, the graphic aspect and the abstract character of the image lead us to another conceptual sphere, the one of the signs and symbols, of the flat forms where we *insert the immaterial bodies of ideas and concepts*. From there, it would be possible to comment on the possible implications resulting from the formal analogy that is established between the shape of the seat and the shape of the painted board. In this case, we should recognize wood as a common element to both shapes. At this point, the work becomes a type of *koan*. On the one hand, we see the seat resenting its "real" and practical character, being reunited with its condition of "place that receives a body" only in the sense of the representation evoked by the image of the meat board. On the other hand, we find the image of the board, which has its "abstract body" strangely incrustated over the wood, that is, over the thing that normally characterizes it not as image, but as an object and thing. In the first case, it is as if we turned a real cow into the flat and conceptual representation of the cow itself; in the second, it is as if we painted this cow in real size onto the cow itself.

Oh my God, it is so hot... Forgive me, but could you hand me this glass, please. Yes, that is the one..... Thank you. Well, let's go back. And what does that have to do with the disassembly between shape and idea you were talking about?

The work is the very synthesis of it. It works as a sort of limp mandala, to where several elements converge without ever being finally defined. Always indeterminate, all of these elements block a series of loose and open relationships inside the painting. Take the painting with the number 2, which is also there. All of the parity relationships there are seen as examples of a gauche dialectics between body and empty, object and image, image and significance, shape and abstraction, abstraction and object, object and world, and so forth and so on. Paintings like "house", "table", and "meat board" explore some of these oppositions in a clearer and more explicit manner, but not very much unlike the painting I just mentioned. As a whole, all of the paintings and objects try to symbolically explicit how abstract concepts, perception and matter walk together in the determination and indetermination of that we call experience; in other words, how concept, image and object are mutually related and redefined beneath and beyond our bodies. Basically, it means to put the machine by Hélio and Lygia to work without having to enter this nostalgic carnival block of the Waldorf school.

I kind of understand what you mean by all of this, however, I believe there is another possibility in these pieces. A more direct and clearer reading, considering exactly this relationship between sign and shape, which you seem to worry about so much. Beyond the rabbit by Wittgenstein and all of this mystical prosody filled with goetia, Satanism, thelema and all of that that seems to entertain you, I have the feeling that this ambiguous, indeterminate and problematic relationship that you so much try to establish between idea and shape, in fact ends up defining not so much the feeling of ambiguity or indetermination, but a feeling of full disassembly between idea, shape and object. A disassembly, however, that is much more historical than metaphysical. I don't know if you agree with me, but here I bring up the hypothesis that these paintings, or better yet, this installation, show a sort of bankruptcy of the modernist project. As if the issue were to show the downfall of any projective and rational possibility in the current society in detail.

I agree with your interpretation and I believe it is not against everything I said. When I talk about this dubious relationship between sign, image and object, I also think of a feeling of abandonment from the contemporary individual with regard to a trace that reorders these elements inside a cohesive and unique system. As to the bankruptcy of the modernist project, I believe that in this sense the work is extremely clear and explicit: the use of old and discarded materials (furniture wood, back of advertising materials, rugs, ruined industrial paint etc.) has thrown a rotten and orphan concrete rationality against the destructural images of an uncommon tachisme and the dirty and ruined stains of a rejected object. By sharing with the support of its waste, debris and dirty condition, every painting, rationality and "humanist expressiveness" – I refer to a certain debt there to subjects like Hartung and Soulages, for instance – remains there only on one indigent, temporary, poor, insignificant and discarded condition. And maybe in this sense you are right. After all, firstly and finally, the problem here may concern exactly the possibility of art and reason in a disconnected and unstable culture. This culture is marked by the imperativeness of consumption and discard, and, because of that, it is not possible to establish a satisfactory conformity between value, image and object.

And in the middle of this, what about this title? Where does it come from?

The title refers to the tattoo Febrônio had around his own trunk. The same tattoo he did on some of the teenagers he killed and raped.

You mean, Febrônio, Febrônio? Febrônio Índio do Brasil, the serial killer who killed and raped a lot of people in the 20s in Rio?

That is him. DCVXVI was the symbol given to him in one of his visions. Even though it seems like a Roman number, it is really an abbreviation, a kind of notarikon of the words God, Charity, Virtue, Sanctity, Life, Magnet of Life. In one of these visions, a blond woman gave this symbol/number to him and ordered that he tattooed it, even if using his force, on some children out there. From that moment on he would call himself the Son of Light, which was also one of the other tattoos he had on his body. In the middle of this madness, according to him, he had a not very simple mission: to declare to the world that God was not dead. That is, the guy wasn't the anti-Christ. The guy was the anti-Nietzsche (laughs). At that time, when he was arrested in the Correlational Colony of Dois Rios, Febrônio wrote his only book, The Revelations of the Prince of Fire. When I had the opportunity to read it – there is only one issue in the whole world –, I was extremely impressed. It was exactly then that, not by chance, I began to do these pieces.

But hold on. What the fuck does Febrônio have to do with this whole thing?

What do you mean? Roman numbers, prophetic abbreviations, murders and rapes, a mystical book in volcanic prose, a guy who calls himself the Son of Light and claims he came to the world to show that God was not dead. Fuck, this was everything I asked Him. It was all I asked God and Adorno. That is when I understood that Marx became much more amusing when you let this whole craziness into the story. Put in the same meat mincer both Satan and the clarification dialectics. (laughs)

Since you brought it up out of the blue... how do you conciliate all of this, that is, the historical-materialistic perspective and the critical theory with this chaos you insist of hermetically leaving there?

I think the answer is really simple, right? We leave it all as it is. Send conciliation to fucking hell. To shove Urim and Thummim up history's ass and expect someday someone will shit from there a fucking grey stone.

Deyson Gilbert was born in 1985 in São José do Egito, Brazil.

Lives and works in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He has participated in numerous exhibitions, including "Imagine Brazil", Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway (2013/2014); 33° Panorama da Arte Brasileira, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil (2013); "Ambigüações", CCBB - Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2013); "23°33'42" _46°40'09", Galerie TORRI, Paris, France (2012); "Mitologias/Mythologies", Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France (2011). He had solo shows as The State of the Art", Galeria Elba Benítez, Madrid, Spain (2013); Culatra, Mendes Wood DM, Sao Paulo, Brazil (2012).