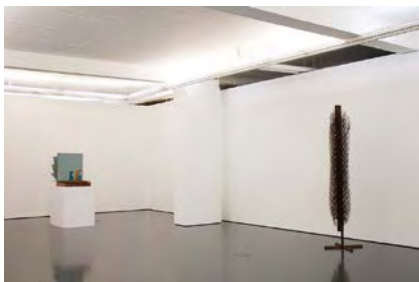


GALERIA PEDRO CERA



this strange, ubiquitous and relentless place we call memory

Andreas Slominski | Fernando Sánchez Castillo | Juan Uslé | Mark Manders
| Mirosław Balka | Yorgos Sapountzis

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I like to think about art as a declination that results from multiple forms and thoughts of the world in permanent tension. The elements that we manage to salvage from this parallel, necessary and speculative creation will culminate in a myriad of socially distinct uses, some of which are neglected in the march of time, while others are overvalued in the spiral of misunderstandings to which we are repeatedly subjected.

Art is inevitably an exercise of memory. Memory that is materialised via individual experiences, interpretations of the world that are filtered by personal thoughts and fundamentally, a memory of the intrinsic history of its previous materialisations (even if dematerialized to the extreme).

When one tries to elaborate a discourse articulating a series of works by means of a curatorial gesture, we must always think that the space which is thus carved out is always almost negligible in the web of all possible meanings of works which immediately encapsulate an inner complexity and are thus exposed to radiating contamination from their circumstantial peers.

The goal of this exercise, which to a certain extent is authoritarian, in the unique time interval in which this coexistence is established, is to enable the viewer to grasp the inevitability of these forms, through an undirected reception, rather than by means of the hubbub that these words nonetheless inspire.

Europeans, with their sense of superiority, unleashed two world wars in the 20th century and at the end of the century vacationed next to an unspeakable civil war. In the intervening years they rebuilt and destroyed, and made pacts with God and the Devil. Now, in a kind of revenge served cold, we have to face the persons who we previously exploited, invaded or simply ignored, without our previous arrogance. That doesn't strike me as being unjust – but what scares me is the complete absence of historical perspective. Of our politicians. Of our elites. To find assertive alternatives before the unbridled capitalism that they created and unscrupulously continue to protect, without space for truly alternative ideas. And a nondescript mass of citizens who have been anaesthetised by the sensation of hyper-connectivity in which each of us establishes own narrative, as if it were extremely insightful and of utmost importance. But the *common good* was never perhaps so shaky and fragile. Because we also feed from our memories. And when our memories are fuelled by the iniquity of insignificant trivia, we ultimately overlook the more purposeful and healthily questioning foundations of civilisation.

In this exhibition this debate resonates in the spaces that mediate the works.

When we look at the paintings of Juan Uslé, we envision that which is vital in his work, in building a pictorial universe determined by an idiosyncratic cadence: the search for a material and physical silence, which is often crucial in order to enable him to follow the action of painting with the rhythm of his own body. A metaphor of closing ourselves off to the world in order to redeem a world that has been woven by this process of existential obliteration. As Uslé himself explains, the capacity of painting to create an effect of immediacy and duration thereby becomes one of the key puzzles of our time. In his case, this oxymoron is resolved in the structured tension between the disruptive organic nature that is invariably found in a minimal painting, of repeated and controlled gestures.

A major part of Mark Manders' work is characterised by the fixation of a universe of forms that inhabit the diffuse territory of individual memory, traversed by the unintelligibility of the complexity of a world in permanent hermeneutic disruption. As he himself points out, his mind is filled by a mixture of words, human gestures and objects that he likes to view as the entire possible lexicon of a universal history in which he is a time traveller. Indulging in a poetic action of reconfiguration of the world from elusive fragments extracted from this encyclopaedic magma, his work combines conceptual rigour with the surprise of archaic forms, timeless figurations and linguistic

speculations. *Landscape with false dictionaries*, of 2014, combines, in the same material plane, the idea of enclosure and scope, i.e. the reduction of a language to a written document, while on the other hand, an opening, in this case towards a landscape that unfolds like a wave. As abstract as the concept of landscape, the concept of crystallization of a developing language into a physical object refers to this fundamental vector in this artist's work - which involves seeking that which he defines as the ultimate essence of artistic creation: the possibility of experience things in their naked form.

Unlike Manders, who traces the poetic performativity of the image in an objectual plane, Yorgos Sapountzis produces sculptures on the basis of elements that often arise from performances and public actions. Challenging the idea of the monument, he interacts with public statues, not so much in order to extract their specific meaning, but instead because he is interested by the manner in which their inscription in the public space unfolds in narratives of power, representation and symbolic mediation. By using a paraphernalia of more or less ephemeral materials, such as fabric or plaster, in the confrontation with bronze or marble monuments, Sapountzis introduces micro-stories of ephemeral experiences in this relationship with the timeless stability of the monument. As a direct memory of the performances, or as a result of processes of investigation and conceptual design of these performances, his sculptures convey a lasting sense of fragility and instability. Unlike the monument, which is consensually erected on the basis of a narrative stabilization, or is imposed, precisely in order to impose a narrative, the artist's sculptures conjure up the uncertainty and instability of meaning, by imposing a more circumstantial and fluctuating vision of reality.

In the case of Fernando Sánchez Castillo, his proposals are precisely articulated in the territory of critical commentary about the interpretative instability of reality that can be conjured up by deleting data from the memory. His reinterpretation of monuments, the symbolic and political urgency that specific monuments and public representations of characters and historical deeds have retained in the recent past, is corrosively structured on the basis of a poignant reversal of the roles and paradigms of this monumentality. The remains of his imposing emptied lion conjure up the image of an obscure reality, based on the cynicism of recycling process used in official statues, made from melted-down bronze of cannons recovered from the enemy in past conflicts. The artist's second work is an unlikely presidential bust with a woollen hood carved in bronze covering his face. Any dignity associated to its putative commemorative function is thereby short-circuited, diverting this possibility to the terrain of symbolic, institutional or political violence.

Andreas Slominski's sculptures are also corrosive. In the line of his famous "traps", and as is usual such works, the artist incorporates elements from everyday life in the production of apparently functional devices. The violence that is detached from the potential action of incarceration of the animal - in this specific case, the title tells us that it's a trap for cats - is underlined by use of a garbage container as part of the device, which renders the associated mental image even more abject. An image of trauma nonetheless prevails within this backdrop of black humour – a metaphor for a kind of premeditated violence, that is studied in order to increase its levels of efficiency.

A substantial part of Miroslaw Balka's work revolves around the weight of memory overshadowed by death and mechanisms of mass destruction that mankind has been able to create, stripped of any sense of decency. Iron, with its imposing and sharp presence, is often wrought in combination with humanized traces, or inhabited by its ghostly trappings: soap, saliva or urine, which are marks of stripping things down, frequent signs of apprehended evaporation. One small work 15x7x3 (Spoon), 1999, is an impressive example of this type of mental and material association: an L-shaped iron which is attached to a circular platform of worn out and petrified chewing gum, which conveys an idea of life on the edge of survival. A dominant aspect of the artist's second work, a totemic structure composed of a mesh of rusty iron wrapped in on itself, is the gravitas that is inherent to the inevitable association with territorial marking devices and barriers to prevent people from escaping. They are remnants from stories across time - even if in the case of the Balkans the main reference is of course the Holocaust – present-day cuttings from a memory in permanent tension with its ghosts.

In a civilizational context with so many open wounds, where the disintegration of commonly accepted narratives and the subsequent questions about what will happen next cause an underground and sibylline feeling of distress, the exercise of memory that such artistic experiences conjure up is nonetheless essential to an expanded grasp of the complexity of the world around us. Because anchored in this complexity, the works of this exhibition lay down a stratum of memory under construction that removes us from the banality of imposed certainties.

Miguel von Hafe Pérez