

JOSE MARIA SICILIA
The madness of seeing

For his third solo exhibition at the gallery, Jose Maria Sicilia is showing his most recent works, in which he deepens his reflection about sonograms, which are sounds converted into shapes. "Making the invisible visible"; the saying is familiar, but is perfectly apt in this case. Throughout his artistic work, Sicilia has been in search of the invisible by drawing on aesthetics of suspended time and whispers. Whether it is for the cycle of *La Luz que se apaga* or the series of *Eclipses*, both on beeswax, or his works on paper or his work on bronze, his work has always summoned up both light and shadow in a dual movement, fine outlines as well as solid shapes, the apparent and the concealed, songs and whispers.

For *The Madness of Seeing*, the artist has brought together a body of work using various techniques but which all emanate from this desire to formalise sounds using computer software.

In the right-hand room, the majority of the motifs painted or printed on Japanese paper are representations of stylised birdsong, and the embroidered elements come from recorded sounds of the embroidering machine itself. In the latter case, what we see is the noise emitted to produce exactly what we see. This *mise en abîme* is also present in functional terms, since the effects of superimposition and entangling are permanent, and after having seen the overall structure, the eye penetrates deeper into the work to discover new subtleties. This hierarchical work highlights the organic aspect of these works. Some are pared-down, while others are quite the opposite, being rich in events. The tangle of shapes, lines, numbers and points clearly comes within the concept of network. But the network as we find it in nature is made of strata and ramifications, connections and folds, nodules and stars. The shapes are distributed and structured sometimes in a deliberate and sometimes a random way. When viewing these works, we see territories unfolding, which the artist seems to explore in quest of a place. Shapes and colours proliferate and invade the field of view, they cover, superimpose and are laid out. One could draw a link between the thinking developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* and the works by Sicilia in this idea of structuring and territoriality.

The musicality which these works exude is due to a harmony between dynamic colours and intertwining of silk threads; looking at certain compositions, one has the impression of attending a concert of singing in a clearing in the early morning. Without us being able to name or even recognise the original sonograms, we realise the richness and variety of the songs used by the artist. These works express themselves in the same way as birds who emit sounds while remaining in the undergrowth, sheltered from any danger. "The frequency of the sounds, their intensity and tone play a paramount role in the recognition of the signal contained in the song, while the repetition and sound power are used to provoke a reaction in the bird which receives this signal" says an ornithologist in a book entitled *Le Chant des Oiseaux* (Birdsong). Is that not the same situation in which visitors find themselves? The artist emits, the viewer receives?

In the left-hand room, the motifs are greatly-enlarged details of sounds. The dimension of the shapes suggests a cry of alarm rather than a song. For this series, Sicilia applied industrial paint on metal which was used in the car industry in the United States. With the embroideries, the artist already instilled a contrast by associating the language of the birds with the noise of human technology (the embroidering machine), and he repeats it here. Certain forms are reminiscent of the austerity of an Elsworth Kelly; we feel that the parts left blank are just as important as the painted parts, that the shape by default is revealed just as much as the stated shape.

Painting a detail means underscoring the idea of the instant. Looking at a detail, we understand that we are pondering a tiny part of something larger. It is no coincidence that the artist has given the generic title *El Instante* to the works shown in this exhibition. Just as the detail blends into the whole, the instant melts into the passage of time. Our thinking repeatedly dissipates with the instant which, inevitable, passes. As Bachelard says, "time is a reality compressed into an instant and suspended between two voids". The instant is isolated between past and future. It is accumulated instants which create the passage of time. Time is formed of permanent discontinuities, and these are the discontinuities that interest Sicilia.

According to him, “birdsong is the instant, only the instant - not the past, not the future. This instant is bliss. One knows that one exists. It nourishes us, yet at the same time devours us. It is the awareness of our solitude. More dead than death, it is the birdsong that has just disappeared. The duration of birdsong is made up of instants that do not last. That duration is life. Birdsong brings time to a standstill. It expresses ecstasy. It gives us back lost cohesion. This time does not slip by - it races past”.

On the first floor, the visitor discovers works embroidered on wool and on cashmere, which emphasize the tactility and the sensuality of many of the artist’s works (wax, paper, bronze, marble, terra cotta). The embroideries are refined, occasionally calling to mind rhizomic structures, and we notice a particularly meticulous care in these five works.

The Wunderkammer contains a display of embroideries on pages that come from a French edition of the *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights* dating from 1910. Found at a Paris specialist bookshop, this edition has a beautiful page layout with which the artist has given free rein to his ideas by creating links to his embroidered constellations. Sicilia has always been attracted by Oriental civilisations and this tale in particular has already inspired him for engravings and artist’s books.

Through all these works reflecting the experience of the instant, Sicilia offers the public not only an excellent opportunity to reflect about the passage of time, but also to see work imbued with joy; which is not that frequent in contemporary art.

José María Sicilia was born in Spain in 1954. He lives and works in Spain, the USA and Japan. His work has been extensively shown in many solo and group exhibitions throughout the world. Solo exhibitions of his work have taken place at Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (Spain), Prefectural Art Museum, Nagasaki (Japan), Museo d’Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires (Argentina), CAPC Bordeaux (France) among many others. Group exhibitions at Musée du Louvre, Paris (France), Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico D. F. (Mexico), The Queens Museum of Art, New York (USA), Fundacion Joan Miro, Barcelona (Spain), Serpentine Gallery, London (U.K.), Sydney Biennial (Australia),...

His work is held in numerous prestigious collections around the world including Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid (Spain), Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (France), Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio (USA), Museum of Modern Art, New York (USA), {Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (USA). Guggenheim Museum, New York (USA).