

NOS[YO]OTROS

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One: Interest in the subject has not abated since Descartes unveiled philosophical Modernity. Whether as substance or form (living being), it is still valid today focused on its quality as creator of one's own experiences by which it relates to the world and is constituted as such. One of the "critics of subjectivity", Michel Foucault announced the "death of man" after reducing him to a game of knowledge structures and power relationships and would later come to realise his inevitability from an ethical point of view. Returning to Nietzsche's message of confronting the present without consolation or redemption, he affirmed the need to overcome man in order to become simply human.

Knowledge of "oneself", as Michel Foucault would say, is indispensable and imperative today. And yet we must remember that man is the first stranger to his own self and greatest enemy of his intimate desires. Juan Carlos Meana's latest work can be found framed within this problem of Oedipal commitment.

The subject heads out into the world and has to be and move within it. He has to accept the present and its determinations, despite the fact that none of it is enough for him, or entirely his own. Not as a duty, but as something that constitutes a state of the individual. It is the affirmation of life and personal self-determination. As a condition of a *life lived* in such a way that "living" does not exclusively mean "suffering". And paying attention to contents, to whatever arrives at the encounter, although without entirely surrendering or remaining trapped by things or imprisoned in identities. It is about finding the way, returning to a home that is actually being done over the course of that journey. In fact, to live will be to go on delaying in the particularities that are things and the states of things, situations, orders and worlds. But to live is also to avoid being trapped

by any of these things; on the contrary, it will be to set foot in them. "The subject is not an essence to be revealed, but an identity to be built, an artifice", as Manuel Cruz pointed out in *Tiempo de subjetividad*. And one of the main difficulties of this, almost a dead end, is the disastrous obsession of reducing identity to national (or ethnic) identity and establishing identity-based politics. It may seem, for example, that the European being *va de soi* and the same could be said of the bond between the individual and certain ancient regions or nationalities. These two comparable yet different levels are connatural to the person. They are profound coincidences with the same equations between the past and present, indivisible from those of the complex society that surrounds us and in which we participate. Intuited riches that are always averse to any analytical explanation. Any explanation will therefore be superficial, simplistic and, above all, superfluous for those who recognise themselves consubstantially in this participation, while the precision of formulating it is a characteristic feature of outsiders, of those who address the regional or European phenomenon from the outside (is this not what Josef Bloch, the main character in Peter Handke's novel *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (1970), indicates? Or even more so, Meursault, another "stranger" among his own in *The Stranger* (1942) by Albert Camus?) These are two levels that, lived simultaneously from within, can coexist and overlap, while at the same time the two contrast notably with belonging to the nation-state or to the nationality driven and sustained by ideologies or, in certain places and moments, by terrorism.

Nationalism is man's most powerful, most effective simplifying tool. It is the one that has had the most resources over the years (single language, compulsory schooling, barracks, political party, war, media, interpreting the country's history, concept of national literature). A series of social pressures acting in common agreement on the person, modelling him, carving him, reducing him to explicit, hegemonic singularity. The multidimensional person, *homo multiplex*—not un-

changeable, but man at the moment in which he is multiple, or knows that he is, or even better said, when he tends to be so—therefore has to admit a simple, collective definition. The level of nation-state suddenly becomes a priority, as opposed to the local or European level, in this encounter with "identity" as an image constructed by the individual to perceive himself and, above all, as opposed to others in relation to categories of social class, gender, profession, group or nationality. It is the feeling of personal identity brought about by social pressure. It was not the "natural" development of the nation that led to nationalism, but conversely, as Ernest Gellner demonstrated, it was nationalism that created the nation. "Identity is imposed from the outside. It tells me not who I am or the meaning of what I do, but who I should be and the behaviour expected of me, under penalty of sanction", wrote Alain Touraine in *Pour la sociologie*. So it is not surprising that someone like Amin Maalouf wrote a tract under the title of "Deadly Identities". One need only consider the 120 million displaced people without a homeland who were circulating around the world at the end of the 20th century in order to escape from misery and oppression. These are the figures who supposedly perfectly embodied the abstract universality of the subject of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and who ultimately found themselves interned in concentration camps precisely because of this reason: not being French, not being Spanish, not even being Persian. The problem of refugees, who radically call into question the pillars of the nation-state, wrote Hanna Arendt, was delegated to international humanitarian organisations, pious statements on the importance of human rights and the police force promoted to sovereign decision-making authority.

NOS[YO]OTROS confronts the identity problems of the subject from the intellectual influence of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot and the philosophy of loss. "We are united by the loss in which we are immersed", as Juan Carlos Meana indicates.

Two: Juan Carlos Meana has long used formats and materials ranging from sculpture to installation in his works. They have been characterised by the use of certain recurring elements belonging to his imaginary: plaster mouldings and household goods, flagpoles with or without flags, mirrors and cabinets that determine or make observation difficult... resulting in pieces that look fragile and precarious, austere and silent. Features that lead us to emphasise in them a poetics of the emptying of meaning captured with physical, constructive austerity, similar to the way the remains of History and the ruin of all epic and national glory are presented. Alongside materialisations seeking to encourage other views and the stripping away of identities.

A body of work whose subject matter moves from the gaze as an instrument of knowledge, the creative process and the myth of Narcissus, to the subject, individual and socio-political identity or power.

The exhibition *NOS[YO]OTROS* that Meana is now presenting to display his latest work includes three previous pieces as a link or taut Ariadne's thread with previous stages. These are the photograph entitled *Sin país* (2012), the sculptural piece *Faltan héroes para darle la vuelta al mundo* (2012-2018) and the video *Confidencias del deseo* (2007) from the series "After Narcissus", examples of an openness to media and techniques. The conceptual parameters and formal elements characterising his work have now been reaffirmed.

This "Meana style" acts as an artist's notebook. And various forms, lines and ideas coexist in it, ensuring that his projects are assumed as a palimpsest of layers. He is presenting works completed since 2016 under the title *NOS[YO]OTROS*. Sculptures and installations of recovered and/or prefabricated elements, paintings on oilcloth, photographs and videos... all of which are constructed objects or architectures and intentionally arranged things to create a relationship with the spectator's gaze. In fact, the pieces act as inter-

connected nodes without any pre-established direction.

Such diversity in Juan Carlos Meana is his refusal to be identified with an unambiguous form that can explain a personal brand formula. On the contrary, as opposed to the work of art as entity and its inability to express unquestionable truths, formal versatility embodies the backbone idea of a journey. The choice of transit places rather than reifications allows him to produce a discourse that underlines the processual element to reveal content rather than autonomous fetish.

In addition to objects such as mirrors (in positions that impede their function), flagpoles (bare, burned, knocked down or with discoloured flags) or everyday items, there are now others to expand the meeting of media and disciplines: measuring tools, bullet shells, bars of soap, etc., with clear connotations that help to shape Juan Carlos Meana's identifiable calligraphy of maturity.

Three: The works in this show belong to six series. They are not grouped by disciplines, media or materials used. Not even by their material production process. Far from uniting the entire exhibition under a single leitmotif, some overlaps and superimpositions of procedures and themes can be observed in them and it could be said that they develop intersecting plots.

None of the pieces is an isolated laboratory experiment. They all respond to the present moment and each series provides an account of the relationship established by Juan Carlos Meana among work, archive and creative process.

– *Conflict laboratory*

The laboratory is always a place for testing, experimenting or elaborating. The term "laboratory" is commonly used in a derogatory sense, as in "created artificially".

– *Community*

This is always the quality of the common, of that which belongs to several. It is the name of a group of people belonging to a town, region or nation. As well as a religion.

– *Belonging*

The relationship of a thing with the person who has the right to it. It is also the thing that is the property of a certain person and, in another converse sense, it is the circumstance of forming part of a group, class, group or community.

– *Aseptics*

The aseptic is neutral, cold and passionless. Everything related to asepsis needs to be free from infection and encompasses procedures aimed at preserving from germs, such as sterilization.

– *After Narcissus*

The myth of Narcissus is a constant in Meana's work. The mirror acts as a device of shattering and shifting subjectivity, showing us the powerlessness of our own gaze. And it leads us to question the spectator, artist and work.

– *Beliefs*

Belief is assenting and conforming to something, full credence given to a fact or news item.

Juan Carlos Meana uses rhetorical strategies and productions that are "allegories of sight". Art as a language of the failure of saying and in the artist's desire for self-expression managing at most to suggest uncertainty through the expressive condition of this very same language. Constantly and always through manifestations of conceptual rigour and formal diversity, using a factual inventory that helps the artist to manage ideas.