

Catalogue *A la deriva*.

University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, 1997.

NO MAN'S LAND

'*Adrift*' is the title of the exhibition with which Pedro Déniz refers to the confusion of our daily lives, at a time marked by dispersion, pollution, saturation and simulation. A time when social identities have been eroded, partly due to the large number of women now on the labour market and to the liberation movements that arose after May 1968 in France, which showed the ineffectiveness of existing gender-related roles. They were old fashioned and did not meet the requirements of the times, making our space a landscape rich in complex singularities.

Jean Baudrillard ensures us that the idea of progress has vanished. This pillar of modernity does not need us to believe in it to continue to grow. The idea of wealth on which production is currently based has also vanished, while its rhythm accelerates, as, indifferent to its original purpose, it follows its own course. Television itself, and the media in general, are completely indifferent to their own images and content. An excess of knowledge is dispersed in all directions and messages upon messages appear without discontinuity. Information and the mass media are some of the issues that inspired the work of Pedro Déniz, from 1991 to 1997, in two cities where he recently lived: Tangiers and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. This creator believes that 'we are immersed and adrift in a sea of messages'. Paintings and work on paper with mixed technique, objects and installations are found in *Adrift*, presented in La Palmita. A project that has reflected on the world of today and the way in which societies are disturbed by the media which, far from being impartial, have specific ideologies and economic interests. In McLuhan's *Global village*, the news and pictures flow at great speed, bombarding citizens so that they tend to submit to the parameters of widespread mediocrity and end up by agreeing with the media, incapable of judging for themselves and therefore unable to freely discuss their opinions.

The bottle is a subject to which Déniz resorts in most of the artworks. This container has been used or painted by him as a symbol of what contains the information we have today. Nearly all his work refers to issues that concern him: ecology, territory in relation to identity, cultural blending, racism, economy or religion, according to which citizens are on one side or the other of the border between a committed attitude and the conformist acceptance of an unfair reality. The *Notes for a speaker* installation is probably where Déniz reveals his most private concerns. Like a diary, he has drawn on the privacy of the pages of a book on a lectern, his reflections about sex, money, nature or the history of art itself.

In a first interpretation, it is the three-dimensional piece that speaks with its own voice without the need to identify with the subject of the rest of the creator's work. Tree trunks laid against the wheels of a shopping trolley or bicycle, horse shoes, a broom, an animal's horn, feathers, an umbrella... are just some of the items with which the artist has constructed a world of objects. In his marvellous book entitled *El mundo del objeto a la luz del surrealismo*, Juan Eduardo Cirlot says that 'the best contemporary artists have clearly warned us of the hidden value of humble objects, whether they are natural or artificial (...) collecting things as

they walk through the city or along the seaside. And they collect them because the peculiar voice of those valueless, and nearly nameless, objects has insinuated itself deep into their minds.' Déniz himself says 'although this work has to do with a dream world, it was created at the same time as the paintings, after the Gulf War, and it contemplates the same issues'. A time when his stay in Tangiers increased his awareness of this particular conflict.

To exhibit these works in the La Palmita exhibition hall has special significance for Pedro Déniz as he has lived in this part of Tafira and stayed here several times, one of them being on occasion of his first solo exhibition in the Canary Islands."

Clara Muñoz

Reflections

“José Luis López Aranguren argued that ‘we should look after our diet of information as the mass media flood the public space with superfluous seas, lots of misinformation.

The ‘incommunication’ media (as Eduardo Galeano called them recently in *Le Monde Diplomatique*) is the issue I have been working with since the Gulf War. That’s why I have used the icon of a bottle, my bottle. I wanted to suggest the already well-known symbolism of the message. It was at that time when I discovered just how blatantly the media were used to fight another war, the war involving us in something that was only interested in greed and not justice. Then I started to understand what Octavio Paz had said:

(...) nobody really knows what ‘human nature’ is. And we don’t know because our ‘nature’ is inseparable from culture, and culture means cultures.

Never before had I felt so strongly the difference of the other, of territory, defeat, senselessness, the pressing need for identity, the trembling in the face of global guardianship, and *single thought* as a kind of no man’s land. I wanted to be taken prisoner by Captain Thunder and whisked away to a faraway oasis where I could have one of those inner experiences. But I always came across some media that remind me: There are no tickets! It is not the time for miscegenation! Nonetheless, dogmas contain an open invitation in themselves. I tried to remove these shackles with my work, and today I know that I am mestizo, but I also ask myself, who isn’t?

Strange Days, a song by The Doors from the 60s says:

*Strange days have found us
And through their strange hours
We linger alone*

Information is specific and singular for the person who emits it and abstract and general for the person who receives it.

Octavio Paz

Nevertheless, in one of her characters from *La reina de las nieves*, Carmen Martín Gaité says:
For the first time I noticed the disconnection and frankness of that roving gaze, circling the momentary light that he could have believed to have seen in mine, and I was afraid of the white lie with which you comfort a fellow castaway.

The above texts afford an idea of the ethical approximation I would like to see underpinning my current work.

Pedro Déniz