

ENTRENCHED... epilogal notes on the work of Pedro Déniz

IANt GfirlsEt Ssight, the broad-ranging interdisciplinary output of the artist from Gran Canaria Pedro Déniz might appear to be purely and even exclusively conceptual.

We could easily fall prey to this simplification if we were prejudiced against conceptual art or, as Simón Marchán Fiz put it, “the art of concept”, a definition I personally prefer insofar as an idea graphicising its methodology.

Generally speaking, people tend to get their hackles up and enter into a kind of state of instant irritation whenever they detect any verbalising component in an artwork, which would lead us to believe, before even analysing it, that word (wordiness or verbliness) equals concept.

A deduction or phenomenological analysis that may reach an erroneous conclusion in advance.

Because ideas are not only represented with verbal language.

In fact, what “making Art” is all about today is developing ideas.

The diversification of conceptualism in this regard lies in lending more importance to the tacit presence of the idea than to its formalist manifestations.

However, this may “be read the wrong way”... because one can fall into the trap of believing that wherever there are words, or even just letters, there are also ideas or, in other words, concepts.

While it is true that, on one hand, this is the leverage used by the art of concept to revolutionise art since the avant-gardes to the present day, it is also sustained on another factor, and that is its ability to construe itself as a language that analyses language and the field of art itself, which makes it metalinguistic.

Then, in the face of such analytic density, the ordinary public shrinks in horror and breaks out in hives. Or the exact opposite, it is intrigued, curious, its interest aroused.

Depending on the public’s intellectual aptitude and its sensibility towards visual entertainment, it will understand, or not, that the art of concept works with concepts and not with forms, without meaning that it is not materialised, in other words, a tangible artistic thing.

And it is on this thin red line (I confess to an evident historiccinematographic dérive) that Pedro Déniz articulates his work.

On the line between thinking and doubting, but where doubt generates experience. Only that, contrary to appearances, for Pedro this experience is more emotional than rational, or at least that is my impression.

With a practice predicated on a highly specific projectuality—and in fact some critics and fellow artists have referred to it positively as biennialistic (as if there were such a thing as “biennialistic art”)—Pedro has been working on *Trincheras del pensamiento*¹ (Trenches of Thought) for over ten years, reflecting on the state of things wherever he goes.

At the Havana Biennial (Cuba), in Mexico City, in Esles, in Santander (Cantabria), and today in his hometown of Las Palmas in Gran Canaria. It seems obvious that the very idea of building a trench is in itself a metaphor.

A solidified consolidation of a bastion. A place to take refuge, but also to prepare ourselves to attack and to defend. Having arrived at this point, from his trenches Pedro Déniz asks us what is worth looking after, entrenching, safeguarding, protecting.

If an artist decides to build a trench, the very gesture of making it already suggests a meaning. And this is something in which Pedro, with the baggage of his participative actional and performative production, is a skilled practitioner.

That these trenches are also embedded in public projects, artistic eventualities or museistic premises also indicates another sign, an act of resistance.

A discordant note, a statement, a call to attention.

In this case, for a redefinition of how we look after our thoughts, freedoms and emotions.

It is no accident that his latest trench devises the vertical drawing of a heart, the symbolic sign of our feelings, our memories, and our recollection.

A place where emotion is stored, entrenched, so that, from there, it can defend itself and prevent ourselves from exploding. And there the concept stops being a concept—word constructed in language—and becomes goose-bumps, a restrained surprise, a concealed teardrop, a vibe, a longing.

As if the artist were telling us that, with this gesture of entrenching himself and entrenching our gaze, what is really worthwhile safeguarding is always within ourselves, and this “within” makes us stronger when facing up to our maddening, devastating externality, so that from there we can rethink the adversity of our everyday as just a speck of dust that will do us no harm.

And this is how a concept, a word, turns and spins, a whirlpool, a vortex of senses that enfolds us, protects us, charges us with energy and makes us feel alive.

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¹ The title of the series, of which he has already created four variations.