

Catalogue: Crossings, The Territories of Reality.

Metropolitan Gallery / Universidad Autónoma de México, Ciudad de México, 2008.

ISLANDS, TERRITORIES OF THE FLOW OF REALITY

Latin-American art owes island territories a lot. It was there where the routes crossed and where the cultural and political miscegenation gave Latin America its flavour. From Canary Islands to the Antilles, from Cádiz beaches to the Mexican Gulf there is a deep historical current and maritime transits that go beyond the borders and unexpectedly, arrive, perhaps in a phantasmagorical way, perhaps as veiled presences and absences that melt origins and races.

Although the Mexican culture has lived ignoring the sea, we have been sensible enough to see on the island what is beyond the sea, a fountain of mixture and renovation. There is a lot left to describe all the islands contribution to our sovereign high plateau civilization and at the same time the contribution of other islands and islanders in their return voyage between Europe and the New World. We must not forget that the Caribbean Islands were the place through which the surrealism, the Négritude and the European colonization of the American continent went.

The ethnical and geographical diversity of the islands is the first territory of miscegenation. Wisdom and the artists' like for diversity are rooted in this diversity. Opposite to the ceremony, the silence, the introspection and the violently compulsory religion, the artists from the islands are the bridge of communication between the Old and the New World. Among Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Haitian, Canary people and a huge variety of nationalities, we get the founding features of the Continental American culture.

Among the things we share nowadays with these islands located in the Atlantic, we can find the migration, the urgent forced and massive movement of thousands of people that are looking for a better life and opportunities in the countries they previously had been colonies. We also share the language, the speech we daily use, which has been modified to accept those concepts of globe and globalization that are not completely understood. We adapt, together with the aborigines, the symbols of a changing and disturbed by violence reality, the commerce and the death caused by pandemic and diseases that were originated at thousands of kilometres of their territory.

Three artists from Canary Islands go across the Mexican high plateau, taking with them symbols, emblems and remains of that historical bastion that joins the mountain and the coast. They have inside the blood of different cultures that has been mixed in their way through the islands. They use mixed and real words, linked with syllables that sound like a lullaby, words whose sounds remind of accents and speeches from the other side of the sea. These three artists Pedro Déniz, José L. Luzardo y Domingo Díaz are part of a collective that join all the individualities and wills, reflected in the exhibition Crossing, Territories of Reality.

And like the three wise men who travelled led by the star, these three men arrived in this land loaded with presents and gifts, strategies and clones in order to create a strange and fascinating show made of fragments of images and words; an imaginary synthesis of what the process of adaptation and questioning of reality is. It is not possible to share with them their bewilderment and difficulties that implies the translation of the world into words and images, symbols and signs.

An encounter of two islanders' sensitiveness has taken place in the three rooms of the Galería Metropolitana: The one from the Canary Islands in the Atlantic and the one from the Tenochtitlán islet, floating on the Texcoco Lake, today called Mexico DF. Which will be the result of this encounter?

The exhibition presents a lot of common things between the two territories: the successive floods of migrants, the roads and intercultural maps that lead from a place to another. The artwork as a whole sets out a state of things, starting by using the language that reflects the reality, giving place to objects and transformed experiences. The whole work sets out a utopia. Why not? When it tries to analyse a fact from all its corners and to propose another possible world. Although arriving in this world means undergoing the grief and sorrow of the exile.

The work exudes great vitality as a result of bright minds, its performance and the accuracy of their artistic solutions. Four large format photographs (Welcome, 2007) welcome us: it is a red carpet that - as a path - leads us to the beach. The red colour of the carpet is transferred to Pedro Déniz' work *Tacking – Seam*

In which the word territory turns into terror, terrorism, continuous poetic echoes that reveals witty language puzzles and enlightening translations. Nothing goes through the mind without being translated into words that interpret the world. The words that Déniz uses turn into references of the global village translated into images.

Comparing the migration of African people to the Canary Islands with the migration of Mexican people to the United States would not be right. African people come from countries in which there is not a modern economical process and they do not have a cultural modernity. Mexican people that emigrate have inherited a modern culture and that is why they assimilate the United States society in which they find echoes from their culture and history while the African emigrant that arrives in Europe has to face a hypermodern society where there is no room for his history and culture.

José Luzardo's work is a symbolic representation of the African migration and of the new colonial routes that the AIDS pandemic has created. He shares references with the artist from Canary Islands Juan Hidalgo, an artist who previously exhibited his works in Mexico. Both artists' works show interest in sexuality as a field to perform. Luzardo's phallic objects are the product of a contemporary design that works with the purely erotic expression to make ethnic distinctions. In his photographs there are colourful black, silver, with and without balls, crystalline phallus on the landscape of the Iberian Peninsula or inside an acrylic box. He has built a circular white tower with them (Don-de Babel), perhaps the most emblematic installation of the exhibition, where hidden words can only be seen in the dark of a room with black light. The reference of the phallus takes us to the patriarchal culture, to the strength but also to the forced sexuality as a metaphor of colonization. Unlike Juan Hidalgo's work, which is set out as a strategy of identity of sexual preference, Luzardo's work takes us near the migration movement, to the AIDS pandemic that violently punishes African people and is spread with its death song all along the continent, encouraged by the lack of medicine, treatments and educational policy. It is there where a comparison with the American situation can be found where the pandemic and the religious intolerance are combined to generate more deaths and diseases.

A red carpet leads us to a third room of the gallery where Pedro Déniz' installation *The Thought Trench* is. Here there is an impressive life-sized circular installation that alludes to the asymmetrical relationship between the immigrant's itinerary and his final destination. The bunker made of sand sacks has two windows that are the observation and control unit. Here the violence with which the migrant is

considered is obvious. The traces of his pilgrimage are some deformed shoes that have been forgotten on the way. His only hope is being able to go over the trench to find an oasis of peace. The idea of turning this trench of destination into a paradise may be romantic but we must not forget that the idea of paradise was widely used and spread as a strategy and political speech in the American Conquer. The new territories were conceived by the European imagination as places where the history could be restarted, where the construction of the utopia in the world would be reconsidered. For the immigrant the place of exile can have the same dimension, as a paradisiac garden watched by the law whose access is forbidden as proposed by Jean Luc Godard in the film *Our Music* (2004): a sublime place surrounded by American marines that assure the condition of island of reality, banned for many people and accessible for only a few ones.

If, as the curators of the exhibition, Orlando Britto y César Martínez, point out, the artist team propose the crossing between reality and utopian thought, the polarization that proposes a work of art between a globalized world ruled by corporations and a shelter island for economical exiles may seem unnatural. However, the exhibition bet on a view of territories of possibilities more than a lesson of geopolitics and its way of showing the complexity of the migratory phenomenon is through Domingo Díaz' works. His reliefs literary emanate from the walls of the gallery in order to suggest the invisibility of men and women, dealt on the front cover news as cases of desperate migratory problems (from Christopher Columbus to nowadays, migration is not considered as an alternative but as a problem) what happens with the human side of these people? They probably will be in the mind of those that have closely lived their drama. The closing of the exhibition turns into an action that humanizes the migration sorrow, by shaping the disgrace through the two reliefs: *Bleeding and Wound*. Domingo Díaz' proposal goes directly to the heart. He takes blood out of the wall, blood that spring up as a witness, thick blood drops that like in the Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão's work they emanate from the cracks. Their presence witnesses that the reality is not only that that we perceive through our senses but something that is under the skin, over our thoughts, inside the anxious look of the immigrant. Just as the Mexican Indians during the resistance against the colony hid their idols behind the walls turning it into an empty place of worship, in Díaz' artwork the crossing memory is hidden in the place and comes to light when the memory recalls it.

Crossings, territories of reality is a curatorship that works with three strategies: the first one would be that of the meaning of the language, the second one that of the history memory and the third one that of the visitor's experience that sails across the exhibition on an Indian canoe, oriented by the signs of the times. The aim of the crossing is learning the experience and giving it a real meaning. The exhibition is a lighthouse that breaks the dark of the night with its light and marks the direction that must be followed. Art becomes a territory of certainty. The dichotomy art-reality that the single creations establish gives a message: Activating the conscience and proposing other possibilities of building the reality. Just believing will do.

José Manuel Springer
Mexico City, December, 2007.