

The city of distance in the photographic painting of Ernesto Morales

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In building its own image, the city has learned to recognize itself in the profound destiny of its own sediment. Moreover, the city has discovered to be the place per excellence of sediment, of accumulation, of stratification. The places where the past and the present, if not the future, insist on wanting to coincide, insist on telling the same stories, striving to nullify time in the continuous accumulation of time. For this reason, the city is at the same time true and false, it is together the place of the familiar and of the foreign. For this, the city reassumes and preserves the figures of time but also destroys them in their repetition. Here, from the feeling of this destruction is born the city of distance. That is to say the place where it is made evident that the city may never be, nor be there, at the same time, it may never hide nor acknowledge its own time. Precisely from this is born the sensation of suspended immobility and together with the sensation of sinking that is left by the paintings and photographs of Ernesto Morales.

What remains of a city, if we remove from it the contingent experience of our passage, if we subtract from it the intermingling of our gaze? Or even, what remains of a city kept away from our affections, from our memories, from our presence? It is from these doubts that one generates the urgency for a photographic and pictorial investigation that puts into play the distance – which is the distance of fields, of point of view, and an intercommunication of aesthetics and poetics – in order to discover the special thickness of an unadorned city from the figures of the time. And it is precisely the exercise of this distance that brings out the deep borders which the city compresses on itself, the irrepressible mass which deposits itself internally and externally to us: that is the menace of the volume of space as the only form, as the genuine sediment of the psychic and sensible demarcation under which our vital space is submitted.

In these works, the lens of distance discovers the secret of the subtraction, it highlights the desert that surrounds the real limits of our sacred cities, and together with it gives to the volume, accorded to a true figurative totem, the deep sense of a presence. Because in the canvases of Morales, even in the disenchantment of the subtraction, it renews the illusion of the volume as a reproduction of a presence, as materialization of an identity. It does not matter what body the oppressive presence takes (even if cloudy and intangible) that dominates our cities, increasingly hostage to volumes that saturate space and require the evidence of one's own presence as only a presence; it does not matter whether it is the presence of a city that enters inside us and at the same time it leaves us outside, which is inaccessible and at the same time makes us inaccessible: the painting wagers on the sense – by choosing to rely on the documentary strength of photography – of focusing on the illusion of presence beyond the figure. This is an uncommon quality found among the experiences of contemporary art so devoid in depth, mainly because this painting of presence, this sense of painting does not conciliate in the brightness of the figure, rather it assumes on itself that the figure which definitively substituted the volume of the city, that same volume that in its own darkness of agglomerated threat to substitute every principle of our identity. That is what splays onto the canvases of Morales, it is the image of a city trapped between two forces, among the inevitable figure of identity and the solid reality of a volume that is a tangible metaphor of a menacing and compact advance of a hostile universe, which is the final image of heteronomy that devours our very presence; what is in these paintings and in these photographs is still alive but by now relegated to a few stains of colour that are deposited on openings that more than anything makes one think about the spaces cut in the wounds.

The desert of signs (despite the calligraphic inscription) and the absolute emergency of volume bring Morales' painting to put the matter of our experience of space and our way to belong to it in question. And it is through this painting of suspension that they reveal to us the paradoxical condition that is our daily experience: living without a solution of continuity and contiguity space-and-time (with our past and our future, with our neighbour and our strangers) that in reality does not exist. The paradox, then, is to live without problems something which is not. Walter Benjamin said that the merit of photography is that of taking away the truth of the instant from the false idea of the continuity of time: here in this sense the photographic painting of Morales subtracts the presence of volume from the continuity of time, it makes us in a certain sense gives reason for our coexistence, allowing us to see against the shadowy destiny of the city, and with its own to catch a glimpse of our own. And it is about of our destiny that Ernesto Morales' city speaks to us, where we stand still on the solidity of volume, like dwarves on the shoulders of giants, and at the same time we lean on a space which collapses. It remains to be understood if that space collapses inside of us, in our memory, or if we are collapse within the space.