

Galeria Estrany-de la Mota

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Ignasi Aballí + Oriol Vilanova. Reversible

Opening: Wednesday, September 21st 2018, 19.00 p.m.

Exhibition: 26.09.2018 – 21.12.2018. Tuesday to Friday from 11.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. and Saturdays by appointment.

The Galeria Estrany – de la Mota is pleased to present the exhibition *Reversible*, a collaborative project by Ignasi Aballí (Barcelona, 1958) and Oriol Vilanova (Manresa, 1980), during the *Barcelona Gallery Weekend*.

From differentiated practices, both artists, share many points of interest in their research. Ignasi Aballí proposes a reflection on representation and perception. His work reorganizes texts, images, materials and processes, confronting presence and absence, material and immaterial, visible and invisible, transparency and opacity, appropriation and creation. He links the excess of images in today's society with the scarcity of meanings that can be attributed to them. Oriol Vilanova is interested in the political mechanisms of construction of history and vision. Applying a method focused on the collection and documentation of images, he presents his work as a file or encyclopedia of visual documents at the service of the deconstruction of the univocal story of the past.

The project *Reversible* aims to visualize the converging places of both authors by blurring the formal limits that exist between their respective works. They start from a common interest in literary forms, especially those which have graphic and visual content, in order to build a series of common pieces. They are very close to the art of combinatorial analysis, which describe their shared universe. They use the language as a way to catalogue or describe the origin of their productions, proposing a series of exercises in which to discover those terms that attempt to synthesize the leitmotiv of their practices. At the same time, each of the pieces establish a relational framework with the viewer, who becomes an individualized interpreter in the process of solving or decoding the puzzles presented by the artists.

The starting point of the project arises from the interest of both artists in the world of writing and, more specifically, in literature with a high graphic and visual content, by the French writer Georges Perec (1936–1982). Perec had an eclectic personality that is reflected in his production¹, he wrote novels, poetry, essays, plays and screenplays. At the same time, he was fond of word games, such as acrostics, word puzzles or crosswords². It is something that he implemented in his writing, these kind of games as literary forms in themselves. Both artists share with the writer the interest in the simple enumeration of things and/or accurate data, in appearance, inconsequential. These are laborious processes that offer as a result one of the infinite possibilities of generating an articulated description of the manifolds offered by the art of combinatorial analysis³. For *Reversible* Aballí and Vilanova, use the quiz format as a practice of intertextuality that allows, in a veiled way, to intuit their identity through the textual polysemy offered by these word games. An identity that spans a good part of the history, geography, politics and arts of the last century.

In the late sixties, from the field of literary theory, Roland Barthes, metaphorically assassinated the author⁴, in response to the events of that period such as the crisis of the subject due to the Holocaust, the crisis of language and the apogee of the structuralism with its slogan "the text for the text". Barthes understood the text as an endless number of quotes interwoven with other texts. Therefore, the author disappeared among many other voices. A conscious literature of itself that questioned its own mechanisms and functions. However, in the eighties, literary critics gave once again a place to the subject and that literary circle consisted of moving from an intransitive literature to a transitive literature⁵. This desire of the subject to reappear was not limited to give it a voice, but rather to make it questioning on the causes of that crisis and the social-historical context in which it is immersed⁶. The writer can only write what he knows and, therefore, is a reflection of himself. It is a game of mirrors, which reflects and describes their interests. In this trend we also find Perec's work, where literature is the best place to think about life and, at the same time, literature is the best place to live⁷.

Something similar happens with *Reversible*, where the authors not only talk about themselves and their context, but also reflect on their work as artists. A reflection that is not realized through critical essays, but within the narrative of their works. Art, as representation, is no longer an invented place, it is a vehicle of thought about itself. However, there is a premeditated interest in the destruction of the identity between both artists, where it is impossible to identify where one begins and where the other finishes. This strategy of concealment of identity is similar to that used by other writers such as Enrique Vila-Matas in novels like *Impostura*⁸ where the readers are the ones who, based on the different possibilities of figuration, can build the identity of the protagonist. The construction of identity based on fiction has been the reason for the plot of many other literary works, for example in *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf⁹ where the social construction of female identity stands out or in *Regarding the Pain of Others* by Susan Sontag¹⁰ where the process of subjectivity and alterity is discussed from the perspective of the pain of others.

The artists have thought their common concerns out, so that each of the pieces that make up the project work as a manifesto. However, these manifestos, as is usual in the artistic manifestos of the 21st century, flee from the collective and aggressive character of the past to become more individual and introverted positions¹¹. These statements of what unites and separates both artists take the form of certain quiz such as word searches and crossword puzzles. This formalization is not anecdotal and has also a link to the work of Perec that was a defender of the epistemological fact of puzzles, in that the set is what determines the elements that comprise it. In the preamble of his novel *Life: A User's Manual* explain in detail those principles that govern the art of the puzzle in relation to the Gestalt teachings: "the object considered [...] is not a sum of elements that must be isolated and analyzed first, but a set, that is, a form, a structure only the pieces that have been assembled will charge a legible character, they will charge a sense: considered in isolation, a piece of a puzzle does not mean anything; it's just impossible question, opaque challenge".¹²

With a neutral style, and as a catalogue, we see the enumerations and classifications proposed by the artists. An order of the reality, or part of it, that works as a reference or description of the scenario shared by both artists. Agreed lists made according to a parameter although, in the first instance, they may seem random. And the spectator is in charge of the reconstruction of these inventories.

As happened in the Vila-Matas novel, the project becomes a challenge where the viewer's has to solve to different quiz and ends up being the leitmotiv of the exhibition, where its resolution or decoding process ends up constructing the meaning the show.

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- ¹ The interest of the French writer for the eclecticism of formats is also shared by both artists who with their work have also questioned the system of conventions of the representation of the work of art, through an eclectic sample of non-conventional materials and formats.
- ² The author collaborated weekly in the magazine *Le Point* (Paris) doing crossword puzzles and other word games.
- ³ Perec formed together with Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais the group OuLiPo (acronym of Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle [Potential Literature Workshop]) with the aim of exploring the possible games and combinatorics within the conventional rules of literature. It explored the potential of those formal correction, such as grammar and style rules, always pursuing the expansion of the field of narrative possibilities.
- ⁴ Barthes, Roland, «La mort de l'auteur» in *Le bruissement de la langue* [1968], Seuil, Paris, 1984, pp. 61-67 (in english published as «The Death of the Author» in *Aspen Magazine*, no. 5-6, 1967).
- ⁵ In grammar, an intransitive verb is constructed without a direct object, whereas a transitive verb is constructed with a direct object, that is, with the person, animal or thing on which the action of the verb falls. (Viar, Dominique and Bruno Vercier, *La littérature française au présent : Héritage, modernité, mutations*, Bordas, Paris, 2008).
- ⁶ The return the subjectivity has been the *leitmotiv* of novels like *Doctor Pasavento* of Enrique Vila-Matas (*Doctor Pasavento*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 2005).
- ⁷ In words of the author "The project to write my story was formed almost at the same time as my writing project" (Perec, Georges, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* [1975], Denoël, Paris, 2007, p. 45).
- ⁸ In the novel, from the publication in *La Vanguardia* of the photograph of an anonymous mental patient who has forgotten any memories from his past, an attempt is made to identify the subject portrayed. From the photograph appear two characters that identify the patient with very opposite identities, on the one hand, he is identified as a Falangist writer who joined the Division azul and disappeared in the Russian campaign and on the other, an anarchist and extortionist that happened briefly in Barcelona (Vila-Matas, *Impostura*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1984).
- ⁹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Hogarth Press, London, 1929.
- ¹⁰ Sontag, Susan, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2003.
- ¹¹ Puchner, Martin, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006, p. 6.
- ¹² In the novel, each chapter works as a fragment of a large puzzle that tells the stories of the inhabitants of a Parisian building at number 11 Simon-Crubbellier street [Perec, Georges, *La vie mode d'emploi*, Hachette Littératures, Paris, 1978 (in english published as *Life: A User's Manual*, D.R. Godine, London, 1987)].

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