

Staging/Stagefloor/Representation

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In recent years, a willingness to stage is a quality that has gained strength in art. The latest works by José Noguero do not escape this quality; they even surrender to it, knowing that resistance is useless: In a conversation between James Lingwood and Juan Muñoz, the former said that his pieces “aren’t theatrical, but are rather a way of theatricalising the act of watching,” to which the latter responded that “the art work participates in a staged relation with its surroundings.” The staging that Noguero constructed for his solo exhibition is situated precisely within this debate. This staging is, as is almost always the case, cold and calculated, since the staging device must be previously mapped upon the stage in order for this device to work properly, and for it to be integrated upon the stage by representation. It is in this sense that the theatricalisation of the gaze and the relation of the stage with its surroundings are both suitably fulfilled by the staging devices that Noguero unfolds in his latest solo exhibitions. These are both fulfilled and also merged with each other, because their respective gazes intercross in order to weave a web of relations between the theatrical devices (the staging), the space (the stage) and the actors (the sculptures, which enact their own representation).

But, what is the necessity of staging? Of what is it born? Where is it taking shape? All exhibition is staging. But there is a path between this affirmation and its materialisation that Noguero has travelled, especially in his recent work, until he finally centered upon staging, turning it into the center of his work (although he apparently masks this). This is a device that is born of an analysis of theatricalisation and of Noguero’s ultimate need, at the time of mounting an exhibition, to make this exhibition specific. This could not be otherwise: staging arises, whether it is wanted or not, but it can be further accentuated. And, moreover, Noguero takes pleasure in these accentuations (mainly of the theatricalisation of the gaze). Accentuations that are chosen, then. Along with

punctuation marks that lead to a particular, predetermined cadence. There is also, in his work, a combination of containment with a more than evident willingness to attract attention: the circle of the staging is closed by the spectator although our first impression is that the art work is hermetically enclosed. The staging is there as a predetermined condition, arranged and ready to be looked at, ready to be taken as such.

The stage

Museum, a video by Arnoud Holleman, clearly demonstrates this theatricalisation of the gaze in an exhibition space, (amongst other things). For this video, Holleman appropriated some scenes from a French gay pornographic film set in a Museum. He cuts the sex scenes, so that only the exchange of gazes remains: between the ancient objects and the visitors, between the video spectator and the videoed action, and between the furtively glancing public and the security guards. Everything is part of a theater of glazes, the stage of which is the museum, the exhibition space. All exhibition spaces are arranged for the act of looking, where sight must be the protagonist, urged and excited. Other problematic issues aside, this video is thus interesting for elucidating these issues: the characteristic staging device of any exhibition, the need to study and lead gazes. We are in front of a stage and, as with any other theatrical performance, the important thing is what takes place upon it. The audience is predisposed to watch what is shown to them, to let themselves be carried away and to participate in the game. If this is true of any theatrical performance, of any cinematic space, it is also true of any exhibition. This is a characteristic which Arnoud Holleman played with in his video, and which Juan Muñoz knew how to maximize in his latest installations at the Dia Art Foundation, the Palacio de Velázquez and the Tate Modern. It is also foundationally present in José Noguero's latest work. The stage is as much the gallery itself – its grounds, walls and corners – as the other minor stages built as scale models, like theaters in miniature (or like other stages). Noguero's containment of theatricalisation is only apparent, a necessary resource in order for his theatricalisation to achieve effectiveness without overflowing. We are, therefore, in front of a deceit, a simple yet certain artifice. His divestment simplifies whilst assuring the theatricalisation of the gaze, a process that comes to be the very subject of the performance. The almost naked stage, sparsely populated, directs our gaze to mechanisms such as the reflection (using mirrors, polished floors and windowpanes in order to achieve this), the figurines and the doubled stage (the constructed pedestals as much as the scale models). Reflection, doubling, representation thus seem to be the objectives of this baroque project, which is full

of edges and doubled directions, in spite of the austere staging and a certain eastern or, at least, archaic aroma. In this last sense, the artist plays again with artifice, with those preconceived ideas and images that the spectator holds to be characteristic of art history. For this reason, like Beuys' affirmation of Duchamp, the silence and the solitude that many art critics associate with Noguero are overvalued. Perhaps, comparably Noguero currently highlights the importance of scenic devices and of the stage itself as a conductor and a container of, in principle, non explicit and ambiguous narration.

The performance

On a stage, which can never be neutral, José Noguero unfolded his scenography and positioned his actors. In principle, everything is static, quiet. It seems as if the silences or, at most, the murmurs, are the protagonists. A protagonism that is only achieved within this arranged scenography. Although this is an exhibition of sculptures and no other media are to be found, it's impossible to forget how the artist works, how he represents, and how he analyzes representation itself. His representation transcends its own media, and constitutes in itself the object of his study. This seems to be so for several reasons: the theaters or stages that he constructs, his sculptures' willingness to be atavistic, and (in memory) his use of techniques related to the mirror. Beyond its enunciation, the fact that this is so demands that we come to a certain halt.

Several pieces are scale models and, in some cases, the stages of some sort of theater. It hereby seems evident that the artist places us in front of a representation or, at least, in front of the place where a representation would have to be set. Like scenic boxes in which, for example, we find a sculpture of a horse upon a base. In other cases, the scale model achieves such a sculptural protagonism that it surpasses its nature as a preparatory study, a nature that is common to all scale models. These stages, constructed on the greater stage floor of the exhibition, further accentuate the representation with each minute that passes; they show us the preparatory studies and demonstrate the staged character of these works (thereby introducing the macro in micro form). They could be almost taken as a trail, left so that the spectator doesn't get confused, but rather becomes totally conscious of the resources that are being used. This last point will be necessarily completed by a third that, in some way, closes the entire process that Noguero weaves around the representation.

The sculptures' willingness to be atavistic can seem, in principle, like a wink to the spectator, who will use their knowledge and memory in order to become in some way involved with that which they are seeing in the

representation. It's well-known that the search for archetypes in sculpture – for the haptic, the frontal and the simplified feature – locates the viewer beyond reality: these are abstractions. In the past, these conceptualisations found their justification in being vehicles for the expression of ideas and models. Nevertheless, these sculptures by Noguero could only be taken as such with difficulty. The apparent serenity of these sculptures can be broken at any moment, as soon as one leaves that stage floor designed for this purpose. These sculptures are, rather, a means to thoroughness, to the slowing down, even the freezing, of narration. The search for the sustained moment is not, in this case, obtained by the paralysis of anecdote, but rather by idealisation. The sculpture is used as photography and as a way to cheat and transform scale.

The mirror is used as an intermediary screen, functioning as one of the elements that weaves the exhibition together. The mirror does not simply double, or reflect it also absorbs; the mirror incorporates and becomes all techniques, as if wishing to affirm the fact that every technique is representation, while all representation is also contained within technique. The scale model works as a miniaturizing mirror, a lens that allows us to see a set. The atavistic sculpture works as a stopped, frozen moment. Following one of its own traditions, the photographs themselves work as a mirror which, upon occasion, returns the artist's own image to himself. In short, this same mirror, integrated within some of the sculptures set in the exhibition space, Works as a deflection of gazes. To go even further; this mirror works as photography, since its own photographs are, after all, mirrors. The theatricalisation of the gaze is weaved within a web of coordinates that can be found in an installation that moves from the use of scale models to the use of sculptures, and, from this, to the use of reflection, insofar as all of us act in front of all mirrors ... as do the sculptures. This is one of the possible meanings of this exhibition, since, with his stages, José Noguero narrates representation itself to us.