

## The sculptor's questions

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If, when evaluating the redefinition of sculpture in the second half of the 1970's, we recognize the leading role played by the artists that entered from other fields, such as painting, or they lead towards questions that up until that moment had more effect on design or architecture – we see that something similar has also occurred in recent years with photography. It doesn't only deal with the general change of attitude of the public towards its practice, but rather, it is specially in the way that the creators carry out their work. There exist a first conquest of scale that has much to do with the entrance of painters into photography; painters that use it as one more means, almost as material. That jumbled mixture, that is so determining for photography as well as for painting, has its immediate reinforcement on behalf of those who seek the support of the industry to reach the desired sharpness and final quality in the images. German and North American artists are those who are at the forefront of an attitude which is now extending to other countries.

In our country, those who work with photography are shocked to find that they are losing ground with respect to others who use those technical possibilities but carry out their ideas from other disciplines. Faced with the predominance of two or three models, they become excess reiterations. Those who proceed and work from other registers possess a greater power of resolution, and as well, they move with another ambition. The distance between the models and their epigons serve as an example of the sensual warmth of the work of Bernard Plossu against the reiterated dryness that others adopt to some of their technical solutions, for example, in the way that they play with the depth of field. Equally sterile is the effect of those who amplify a motive belonging to the theatrical sense that changes of scale have: *cibachromes* of a large format, of elegance and suspicious neatness, full of exposition rooms, mixed in with supposed false feminist and political proclamations, from a type of norm that

is boringly plain, domestic and personal. Images with that level of correctness that doesn't hide the simpleness of thought that blankets them.

The first pieces of art made by José Noguero that attract attention are sculptures that contain a lot of exercises about the meaning of ornamentation and photography. Photographs that show so much of the youth of the artist who has made them, perhaps because of that gradual search and conquest that their scales possess, like the origin, which is not at all of a conventional setting. Some medallions, a bit mannerist in style, begin to decipher the keys that make sharp pieces of work, such as the lying and *silent* body, of schematic and subtle tidiness. The effect of this images is unquestionable: a measured power of seduction hides itself in pieces of work that show how to evaluate the silence and emptiness. Silence and emptiness that are put into each images, with identical determination and decision as that which he selects in a setting, a color, a line of escape or a light.

Noguero is occupied with both matters in the triptych which was edited for his individual exposition in the Joan Prats Gallery in Barcelona in 1993. "Why", – he ask, in an aphoristic way – "in my latest work do I experiment with the fascination for animal, vegetable or geometrical motifs pertaining to the history of ornamentation?" He wrote this after an affirmation that, made in relation to this fascination, could seem incorrect: "I have a preference for abandoned factories and rural landscapes. I value the emptiness that correspond to ancient experiences of life, forgotten events and presences". One might imagine, uniting both thoughts, that we would be in the presence of a nostalgic artist, anxious to select his iconographics, which is far from being true. Noguero recognizes his work space and the preferred place which the absences have in it, the memories treated like fragments, fragments of something that has happened, but that want to install themselves in those cracks, investigate those silences, those temporal trips, those areas of ambiguous confusion between the most objective cutting reality and other less tangible realities that seduce every artist. Faced with this conscience, it is logical that one could ask what is the origin of the seduction that define his sculptures. It could be said, also, that a feature which is particular to Noguero, that we are going to come across later, although it could be coming from other arguments, is the way he understand, assumes and makes visible the existence of areas of debate in his thinking. He says it in an undeniable way, when closing his confessions of 1993: "These things are the interrogation that they generate, are the foundations of my work as a sculptor". This occurs for example, with the sexual evidence of images shown in Luis Adelantado's stand at Arco 96: they mustn't be taken so

much as final proposals but rather as confessions of an interior debate – questions asked aloud.

In 1992, Noguero felt himself to be a sculptor, a sculptor who was attracted to the world of ornamentation and a certain feeling for the neatness of the profession. These are proclaimed in his initial studies of cabinetmaking and a later grant to analyze Baroque ornamentation in Naples and Rome. Three pieces dating from that year, that recreate a coat of arms or play with the meaning for a border that is almost Rococo, offer solution with an undeniably personal meaning. In the interior of two of them are inscribed, on top of a background of powerful architectural solutions, the slightly stylized figure of a youth who has the appearance of the artist himself. The resolution is alive and the search for a direct illumination, that sharpens the contrast between volumes, forms and drawing, ends up giving sense and difference to some of the images which are far from being realist essays that keep with tradition. This is reaffirmed by the third sculpture, with an empty interior and a figure seated on the ornament: an unsettling image that seems to be warning us that its attitude is a clear defense against being viewed, of a way of looking which is curious but firm and in its own way, inquisitive.

Created somewhat later, is another sculpture, that of a lying body in whose solution gives a new turn to the schematic as well as consciously eliminating the background, as if it announced its substitution for another, less rigid, complex in its preparation, but warmly scenic: that which leads toward solutions resolved with the aid of photographic techniques.

Noguero minutely prepares the *takes*, at the same time and with analogical determination, as he does with his dedication to sculpture. However, what happens is that it takes little time to show his domination of the techniques of distancing games played with perception. His photographs neither rescue ephemeral moments nor detain an image in movement: they are born and they feed on very distinct concepts, such as silence, emptiness, stillness, absence, and abstract time. Concepts that function as *the sculptor's questions*. To adopt a point of departure which is so conscious and clear, gives personality to his work, but also it differentiates from other practices in which models are continued without parting from their own reasons.

Noguero has them and they betray that he is a sculptor, including when he works with photographs, resorting to a large format and utilizing values proper to painting. He works with space, forms, emptiness; saying it also with silence, with absence, and he values time as detention which can be seen more an exer-

cise in language than a point of analysis of proposition. One can however try to come close to an explanation, being sure that it is understood that his work continues speeches which seem at the beginning to not be related. Two distant stories, one narrated by a novelist and the other put in images by a director of cinema, end up moving us towards the problems of which are occupied, in a central way, by Noguero.

Doctor Murke, the celebrated character of Heinrich Böll, collects radiophonic silences that he conserves and joins together to create others that are more prolonged and intense. Because the first is evident, easy, a simple addition but the second has an air of discovery: the intensity of a radiophonic silence is larger than the others, just as time in television is more concentrated than that which passes in the pages of a novel. Noguero doesn't collect pieces of silence but he cuts and use them, he distributes them throughout the space. Their silence are empty spaces that he situates very carefully, *as if they were objects*. With this accomplishes unsettling effects, converting them into an axis of the efficiency of the pieces of work. On top of these silences rest, in large measure, the idea of time proposed by Noguero. A time not referring to chronology and chained succession but rather to "abandoned factories, ancient experiences of life, of forgotten events and presences". A time, in conclusion, detained, mental and pertaining to the soul at the same time. Noguero gives those silences, those empty spaces, a feeling of presence, in the same way as sculpture at the beginning of the century emphasized the hollows, an affirmative feeling that took little time to modify the speech of the discipline. Probably one of the differences between both procedures consist in Noguero's knowing that his resources add emotional value to the work: he knows that he is working with temperatures, and that those temperatures are implied directly.

That conscience defines other behavior as well. Before realizing his *takes*, he prepares the space, ordering and distributing the elements that have to be characterized. Elements which are almost always as scarce as they are intense: ample fragments of wall, (panels that claim as much for the power of their presences as they do their fragmentary condition) lights of direct incidence, small and enigmatic figures. They have a setting that is not reproduced directly but rather through reflections. The images that persist are product of the reflection of their scenography on large mirrors supported on a wall, alone and apparently forgotten. The resources add a feeling of distances I which, directly, show a master artist. His images are in the kingdom of measurement, of filters, of reflections, of sieves, of winks and a seduction. Without them, they would lode freshness. He resorts to a non-ostentatious scenography that poses

a way to look, as well as letting one look into the conscience. Noguero makes the small figures that later are integrated in his compositions, distancing them with this peculiar game of reflection that reduce its possible emblematic meaning and what it shows is a way of looking which is intense but at the same time has an evasive appearance. In fact his photographs don't advance towards us in the way that is usually the habitual behavioral of every object: they seduce the viewer, they oblige one to follow their trail until finally, one is trapped in a invisible net of gradations of light, of imaginary distances, of intensities. The spectator believes he has detained this motive but feels that something is escaping, and this is not strange: he has followed a reflection, the ungraspable image in the interior of the mirror.

In a point of time and in a generation where almost everyone quotes Duchamp, Baudrillard and Benjamin under whatever pretense, Noguero doesn't join in this game. In some of his reasoning it is not difficult to find him feeling *Duchampesques* but his pulse is nearer to the surface, it is not so mental, one feels his warm behavior, something that is almost natural. What occurs, however, is that on occasion some pieces of work seem to point to precise strategies, which they are, in the case of the *takes* in which the sharp figure of a dog faces the light and an empty chair that is occupied immediately by the artist, in an attitude that also encloses a meaning, separate but *iluminated*. Seeing the correlating photographs, the event is clear, *even* though both claim their independence – their total significance as fragments and final images.

With the Noguero of the slow and gradual production and a world of rather precise environments, a type of explosion has occurred in the last two years. The boldness is greater but without having a leap into emptiness. In the formal Noguero, he remains a cautious artist, not taking a step until he knows the way ahead. Where he shows his firmness is in the naturalness in which he undertakes the themes which are close to him and which he *confesses*. This is because his work has a lot of self-analysis and confession, but a confession which never goes to far. Not even when he resorts to color to arrange sensual stills without hiding the gesture and the direction of the hand. He relies first on observation and the checking of what his view finds. In this way, his form of working is related to that of Jimmy and Rose, the two Irish fifteen-years-old that Neil Jordan presents, imaginings the stories and thoughts of those who cross in front of them on the street. The game, initially childish, ends up assuming the largest risk, acknowledging its radicalism, its commitment and its involvement. Noguero's proposal differs from that of the lead characters of *Amor a una extraña*, in the measure in which he isn't interested in relating or

guessing (and telling us) what is happening. He doesn't make imagination the compliment to reality – he doesn't give the answer to our questions. Noguero poses the question and distributes the elements but leave it up to us to elaborate the story. His images offer moments of pause, of tense stillness, in the subconscious something is just about to happen. Something, logically, that the artist doesn't reveal: it is something that he very carefully leaves pending in *suspense*.

A good part of the plastic arguments in his work are contributed to this climate of emotional uneasiness, detained subtly before coming to the point of explosion. The way of setting up an almost naked scenography, with the minimum amount of objects and very carefully arranged, in spaces that are very well defined but without rigid limits, or the almost symbolic value of the motifs: everything permits the creating of a situation, a setting, which the artist claims from the beginning. The result is that, with the passing of time, his scenarios obtain psychological traits. His spaces are fragments of rooms, flooded with a light that modifies their limits, that bathe the walls but that, in their origin, acquire an emotive condition: the light sieved by the translucent glass, not transparent, which is in the door leading to a balcony, acquiring its meaning as a halo, which helps not so much to convert the space into something mystic but rather to suspend that which happens there, insisting that a moment of tense stillness be chosen, a moment of dense silence. The way of slightly knockling down the stills, to carefully place suspended objects, to make that which is represented schematic until inducing his characters to hide with their thinness because the light eats their limits and equally contributes to the creating of that sensation of mystery, of a mental reality and as well, the value given to the viewing games, due to the fact that these are not usually direct but rather absentminded, deep in thought. So much more can be said about the feeling that, in the passing of the years, they have the chair, the horizontal coat rack, the suspended boat, the dog: dense arguments on the theme of waiting. The emptiness, the silence, the waiting, detained time and the reminiscence as an image that is inevitably selective: features that give character to presence, never of errors. Features that serve Noguero at the hour of elaborating a speech that we perceive to be clearly sculptural.