ANA MAS PROJECTS

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Damaris Pan

Un martillo en la cabeza

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Ana Mas Projects is pleased to present 'Un martillo en la cabeza' [A hammer in the head], the first exhibition in the gallery by the artist Damaris Pan (1983, Mallabia, Basque Country, Spain) that brings together a selection of recent paintings inhabited by the characteristic lenguage of forms, textures, and color palette of the Basque author and that is framed within the artistic programming of the Barcelona Gallery Weekend 2022.

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I have been trying not to write with my stomach for a couple of years. I have always been a cerebral writer, but the stomach, in a reasonable way, often helps to give the text a bit of warmth, of closeness with what is being told. It is true that it helps to reveal one's feelings in the presence of the painting, although it is usually used too much and ends up becoming a celebration that is not really a celebration. I read from a letter that Adelina Moya wrote to Damaris Pan: "And I like it when you say (more or less) that you pour your heart and your soul into something that, in reality, is only painting". And suddenly I understand that's what I have been looking for so long. Not giving up writing from the stomach, but understanding what you say is really important to yourself and for that very reason you have to leave something of yourself in the task. Perhaps not so exaggerated, but something like when Luis Gordillo stated: "In every painting I buried a corpse".

Writing is not easy. It never is. One must have something to tell, and what is told must have at least some interest for whoever is the recipient of those words. Writing about painting is not easy either, it should not be. Particularly when painting is given supernatural powers. I remember that some time ago I replied as follows to an invitation to do so: I am at a stage of rethinking my relationship with this discipline and trying to get into it from other fronts. I think that literature has been used too much in painting. You might already know that it is relatively easy to tackle a text emotionally for those of us who write, and I feel I need to rethink certain issues.

Damaris Pan's painting presents, to whoever is commissioned to write about it, a couple of complexities that cannot be left out. First, the painting itself, the feeling of being faced with a work that, by referring so clearly to so many other paintings, ends up becoming highly characteristic. The other is that Damaris Pan, unlike many other artists, manages to write about her painting, or, if not about it, in the same way she paints, and her writings let us confront the painting to understand what causes it. This usually becomes a problem that shows multiple deficiencies for those who write or paint exclusively with the stomach.

Un martillo en la cabeza [A Hammer in the head] arises from an extirpation that Damaris Pan makes of the title of the third episode of the series *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. *A Hammer Blow To The Head Can Injure The Soul* is the title of Fassbinder to which Damaris Pan refers, and brings to mind the onomatopoeic Franz Biberkopf, a grotesque character, representative image of the interwar lumpen. Un martillo en la cabeza also sounds like an ACME device, the ending of a chase between Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. And I do not say this for no reason, there is a lot of all this in Damaris Pan's painting, a lot of onomatopoeia and irony. It might be the reason why her way of talking about painting is free of affectation, because despite pouring her soul into it, she is able to define as peanuts some recurring forms that appear on her paintings, which are real, sometimes they really are peanuts, and evoke Carlos Alcolea's *Las gafas del pintor* (1978). They are reminiscent of them since, in Alcolea's painting, those glasses refer to a Möbius strip that in turn would represent his vision of painting. A strip without a delimited interior or exterior, a non-orientable surface that could be those peanuts of Damaris Pan, or the peanuts could be a Möbius strip, an idea of infinity filled with that colour that until recently was called *flesh tone*. Whose flesh? Nobody's flesh. Skins, if anything, which appear in each of her paintings.

Painting peanuts to dilute perhaps the notion of limit, or perhaps for the opposite, to create that *room of one's own* of gentle shapes, sometimes soft and viscous, as Louise Bourgeois would do, whose *flesh* will have a lot to do with Damaris Pan.

Damaris Pan works from flatness, through the superimposition of planes on planes, of skins, and her search for depth might sometimes seem naive. It is weird, it is a depth that is understood more through some basic notions of perspective (since they allow us to understand the intention), than through the spatial effect produced by its application. For example, an oval turns a rectangle into a cylinder, or some yellow planes try to give the impression that in *Lemon curry*, a figure of Romanesque volumes, there is a depth that is really a lie, a trick. However, in Damaris Pan's painting there is no fake childishness. She does not play to unlearn, to show herself differently than she is. Damaris Pan is an academy, technical and research painter, who searches, who pours her heart and soul into it, but who accepts that it is only painting, and therefore she can also afford to joke.

Back to Gordillo, some time ago I was surprised when I identified that Damaris Pan's painting has a lot of Gordillo. I observe in depth the painting of the two, I could say that the link is in the way of limiting the planes; in the fact of understanding the base as if they were many —although that might also stem from her formation as a sculptor—; in the way of diluting the limits between figuration and abstraction, even joking about a debate that disappeared long ago. It is Tuesday, July 19th. In her studio in Bilbao, Damaris Pan analyses in front of one of her canvases how fanciful pictorial composition is. How thin the line between achievement and failure is, we say. Gordillo would say that "a painting is a meeting point between multiple impossibilities". In Damaris Pan's paintings we observe great planes of colour that in many cases represent a headlong rush, an attempt to save a canvas in which some parts still resist that urge not to throw in the towel. It is then that those coloured layers appear at the forefront, applied not with clumsiness, but without intention. Therefore, there are two varieties of different lines on her painting, those used to compose and those used to cover. In the first, we detect the hand of a convinced painter, who displays the trade of an acquired technique. In the second, a hurried Damaris Pan appears, who flees, and who in her escape solves problems that she had been unable to solve before. She blocks planes and poses questions, covers and therefore increases the possibilities. These words by Iñaki Imaz, another clear *gordillista* from the Basque school, might help to understand it: "If I perceive any possibility that anything made by me is going to be interpreted in an unambiguous way, I immediately delete it".

Then I think of the connection between those skins and the line that often appears to delimit them, but also to mislead, to generate that fake spatial notion that takes us to that interior-exterior, to that Möbius strip. I see Philip Guston paint in the documentary *A Life Lived* (1981) by director Michael Blackwood. It is no coincidence, in the conversations with Damaris Pan, Guston appears repeatedly and after seeing her painting, no one should find it strange. He works in a rush in his *One-Shot-Paintings*, and creates stains on which he later superimposes the line that defines the figure. It might be what the painter Luis Seoane commented about El Lissitzky, when he figured out that, if the Russian started from linear structures that he called skeletons, on which he later laid geometric abstract masses, Seoane declared that his process was the other way round and that, after the production of the abstract masses, he incorporated those skeletons that defined the figures. Seoane operated in that way as a means of maintaining the bond of his painting with people, as a political position, and I wonder: how does Damaris Pan operate? In what order? Who makes her do what she does, and do it that way? I will continue to think about it.

Ángel Calvo Ulloa