

POR TRÁS DAQUELA JANELA

X rating for *tableaux vivants*

Seek out pleasure, my friend, and do not judge... seek it out, I tell you. Leave it to nature to lead you wherever it wants, and to the Eternal to punish you. (Donatien Alphonse François de Sade)

Bodies that come and go. Anonymous shapes calling for other liturgies. Silent and placidly alive. Identical meanings. Almost the same scenes. Knowing that the discursive enunciation of modern societies has abandoned the obscurity of sex, devoting itself to talking about it in order to better circumscribe it to the space of the sacred, the artistic programme that is manifested in the works of João Gabriel does not attribute any importance to the sexual act. The images offer us the intense dynamic relationship that is established by the temporality of before and after – the possibility of subtracting bodies from the stereotype of the centre renders the semiotic apparatus unviable. Convoing a visual *intermezzo* that produces the substance in which desire is activated, probable bodies await the multiplication of new pleasures.

Titian and Tintoretto, Velázquez and Goya or Hockney, Fischl, Basquiat, Baselitz and Kiefer, are some of the references already mentioned by the artist in other circumstances. However, it is the underground gay porno films of the 1960s that most directly represent the starting point for these works. While, on the one hand, the proliferation of discourses about sex has not led to the autonomy of bodies, on the other hand, the eventual transgressive and marginal nature of pornography only continues to be eternalised in a system that affords it the place of the forbidden and of social reproduction, thereby moralising it. Subversion ceased to be the antithesis of repression long ago.

The substantially performative pictorial gestures that are objectified on the canvas are not places for the dissimulation of bodies or of sex, but for the fabled recording of the impulses that, without any explanatory mechanisms and freed from the theatre of political operations, thus advance what it is proposed should be shown. Confronting us with a kind of visual rhetoric, it is the hermeneutics of a certain *mise en scène* without any artifices that has organised itself and is expressed through the unknown figures: In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible is the gaze that is outside.

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It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. (...) The gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which (...) in a fragmented form I am photographed.¹

Between what we are, what we look at and what we see, what we are given to see and what we wish to see, there is a whole relationship that is founded on misunderstanding:

Modifying the formula I have of desire as unconscious—man's desire is the desire of the Other — I would say that it is a question of a sort of desire on the part of the Other, at the end of which is the showing.²

The overcoded head — which Deleuze and Guattari call the Face — is, above all, what the artist offers us. The *bunker face*, overriding the portrait, is consolidated in enigmatic, casual brushstrokes that conceal as much as they reveal. In keeping with Levinas, it seems to be in the face that we encounter the Other, the potency that separates each person from their sovereignty. It remains to be discovered whether this axiomatic surface of organised faces, not conforming to the binary relationship or the order of normality — and which, in these images, appears to operate within the micropolitical field of pornography between men — is (un)aware of the grandeur of the singular velocities and socio-political effects of clandestinity. Bursting forth in the splendour of the surface and marked by the experience of biographical events, these paintings show us bodies that do not assert themselves in the origin of the social world, but instead at its limit.

An exhibition in which identity falls apart and the Other is revealed. As Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, “a pure hole in the world” — merely the scenario of otherness. There is nothing else. What the bodies hide the faces do not show. It is *behind that window*³ that the voyeur is looked at by the painting. Discovering that painting is not dead and ending up succumbing to it.

Eduarda Neves

Translated by John Elliott

1 Jacques Lacan — *O Seminário. Livro 11*. Rio de Janeiro. Zahar Editor, 1988, p.104.

2 *Ibid.*, p.111.

3 *por trás daquela janela* — the exhibition title.