

Martinho Costa

Testigo 25.01 - 14.03.2020

A fascination for the visible

by Vanessa H. Sánchez in conversation with Martinho Costa

The best way to explain what Martinho Costa presents in his new exhibition *Testigo* (*Witness*) is with his own words: "It must be said that the exhibition is not about Spain or the theme of landscape nor travel" ... But this exhibition begins with a trip indeed; a trip that he does not want to refer to, for all that the philosophy of the trip entails, or does not want to talk about how the artist embodies the figure of the traveller, a seeker with no return, or maybe he does not want to see himself as a tourist, as it is described by Paul Bowels in "The Sheltering Sky", where the tourist will travel the world as a collector of sensations, being always aware of his return, because this is not what Martinho Costa wants to talk about. Because this exhibition is not about the trip.

Testigo emphasises the particularity of painting as the discipline of the gaze par excellence. From a slow, in-depth look, which does not pursue moral discourses or any other kind of narrative, we will not find anything but the pure act of presenting things made painting; a kind of look that makes you remain analytical. As the fifteenth century treatise "Della Pittura" by Leon Battista Alberti introduces us to a new era of painting, breaking with the old medieval system and dismantling the concept of genius in favour of the virtues of diligence and dedication involved in visual appearances, Martinho Costa brings these concepts to the contemporary, to understand what we see in the pause of the analysis, and to see and understand things because we are observing them. And this is his trip, seeing and understanding in new places, with new eyes.

In his case, it is the camera he uses as a sketchbook, as an observation tool, as a traveling painter of the eighteenth century, who would write down all his visual experiences of the new world in notebooks—and then gave free rein to the colonising ideas of the exotic—. Martinho Costa collects his images as sketches that become sensitive looks of the mundane, but how to span the entire world and catch it? It seems that this is the artist's main goal: to understand—as a philosopher would—what happens in the world and how to express his hypotheses about it in painting. Each new work of the artist consists of a *whole* at the same time. But, when the option is the *whole*, how do we get to decipher that *whole*? Martinho Costa starts from the idea of archiving, as a sensitive archive of things, of the tangible, and it is here that he faces what he means by painting and what he does not. There is a first empirical and intuitive work in selecting the images he wants to paint but this does not always follow a pattern.

A new approach to his pictorial practice can be seen in *Testigo*: he has stripped himself of the technology that always accompanied him to face the canvas directly. A confrontation that makes him work faster and more intensely, where he sees his weaknesses as an exposed painter and that makes him reflect clearly in these terms: "I recently listened to a podcast about Francis Bacon's current exhibition in the Pompidou, which talked about the idea of strength in his painting, something that made me think. The painting as witness of the painter's force on the record of matter. Painting made meat. Now that I practice this "no-grid" way of painting the muscle is more evident. The gesture is longer, it has more doubts, sometimes it turns out, sometimes it does not. It is a real battle. You lose or you win. Before, it was all a bit more controlled, more towards the result, "without thinking" as Gerard Richter says. Now I rather pursue what I decide is important in an image (an essence)." It is for all this, perhaps, that in this exhibition we see paintings that would lead us to abstraction or ambiguity, a definitive new manner for Martinho Costa: a fascination for the visible.

Martinho Costa

Fátima, Portugal, 1977

Lives and works in Lisboa, Portugal

Solo shows

2019

4 Cortinas, Estação Sul e Sueste, Mercado Primeiro de Maio, Barreiro

2018

Gradient Tool, Museu Soares dos Reis, Oporto

2017

Terra de Sombra Queimada, Galería silvestre, Madrid

Art Santander 2017, Project Room, Galeria silvestre, Santander

2016

Folding Screen, DA2 Salamanca

Layer 0, Galeria 111, Lisboa

Casal da Cega in Dub, Galeria Vera Cruz, Aveiro

Baixas Frequências, Galería silvestre, Tarragona

2015

Todos os Dias Saio Por Um Caminho Diferente, Galeria silvestre, Madrid

Pedra, Project Room, JustMad 6, Madrid

2014

Unnecessary Repetition of Meaning, Galeria silvestre, Tarragona

Les Statues Meurent Aussi, Galeria 111, Lisboa

Group shows

2018

A Arte de Furtar, Pavilhão 28, Lisboa

Variations Portugaises, Centre Art Contemporain de Meymac, Francia

XX Bienal de Cerveira, Cerveira

2017

Pinturas con Daniel Vasconcelos Melim y António Melo, Galeria Monumental, Lisboa

2016

Gente, Cem Anos de Representação Humana na Coleção Manuel de Brito, CAMB, Algés

10ª Prémio Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, Museu Municipal Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, Amarante

2015

Positions, Berlin, Galeria Silvestre

Just Mad 6, Madrid – Project Room

Viagem, Casa da Cerca, Almada

2013

Entre as Margens – Representações da Engenharia na Arte Portuguesa, Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, Oporto

5 Artistas em Sintra, next room, Lisboa (with Luís Nobre)

Bibliography

Porfírio, José Luis – Revista Actual, Expresso, 19 November 2016

Espejo, Bea – El Loco de La Calle, El Cultural, 24 July 2015

Martins, Celso – Revista Actual, Jornal Expresso, 28 Juny 2014

Barro, David – “Anotações para uma pintura com forma de palimpsesto”, catalogue of the exhibition *A Imagem Seguinte*, November 2009

Collections

Opway Collection, Lisboa

Manuel de Brito Collection, Lisboa

Fundación PLMJ Collection, Lisboa

Associação Industrial Portuguesa Collection, Lisboa