

Gloria Martín

Une peintre en bâtiment

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It is not what it seems

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In spite of the traditional disdain that *autonomous* artists have for *applied* arts, the foundational myth of painting was led by two trompe l'œil artists. According to Pliny the Elder's tale, Zeuxis and Parrhasius staged a contest. Zeuxis painted some grapes so deftly that birds flew down to peck at them. When Parrhasius asked his opponent to pull aside the curtain concealing the painting, Zeuxis invited him to do it himself. Parrhasius's curtain itself turned out to be a painted illusion. "I have deceived the birds, but Parrhasius has deceived me".

As it is known, the art is an invention by eighteenth-century Germans. They thought that the artwork had to be autonomous and useless, some sort of luxury of the spirit. Therefore, everything that is moved by *external* motivations or *it is useful for something* has to be looked upon with suspicion. The genius opens paths to be walked through by others; the house painter decorates — at most. This distinction, as arbitrary as most of the ones we deal with in our field, becomes problematic as soon as we focus on it. The simulations and the imitations get an undeserved bad press: is easy to keep a marmoreal appearance for a slab of marble, likewise a window lets the light pass through effortlessly. Nevertheless, to be able to *make* an alcove *appear* on a plain wall or to make a board look like stone requires mastery.

To be rigorous, is it not the Duke of Lerma's portrait the same mirage as a painted moulding? I suspect that this distinction is supported by the idea of originality: Rubens did not have samples of the Greatest of Spain on horseback. However, the idea of compiling skills and knowledge in a comfortable exhibition device must not be dismissed: the honesty and ability to synthesise are admirable talents. One can imagine the painter, with his discreet vanity, meticulously showing his dexterity to his clients. "I make marble, stained glass windows, impossible architectures, volumes where there are none. I make them without a fuss, but with the greatness of the spirit. You may live in my artwork. It will be your private treasure: neither museums nor the History will take it away from you".

Une peintre en bâtiment is an exhibition by Gloria Martín Montaña (Sevilla, 1980) at Galería silvestre which recreates, from contemporary artistic practice, the work of those painters who weaved, with expertise and mastery, all kinds of materials and ornaments.