

ON ANA ESTEVE LLORENS' *STUDIES FOR FUTURE OBJECTS*

Ana Diz | New York 2016

Bare of rhetorical gestures, the colors and shapes of this installation speak the language of minimalism. Ana Esteve Llorens says that, rather than a choice, minimalism is a trait of her character, her natural way of being in the world. Some shapes and colors could be described as recognizable objects --a yellow arrow or the fragment of an ornamental scroll (the two green pieces). They all are, however, simply geometry -- yellow triangles, blue squares and rectangles, green sections of a circle--, single entities made out of the coming together of shape and color. When associated with geometric abstractions, color is freed from its usual descriptive role and becomes a noun, as it were, instead of an adjective. The deceptive fact that we need a sequence of two words to express the notion "yellow triangle" results from the inherent linearity of natural languages. Free from that limitation, the languages of visual art are able to represent that which is simultaneous in simultaneous ways.

Many contemporary installations represent our everyday world, often in ways that empty it of context and meaning. Against this tendency, *Studies for Future Objects* privileges abstraction. And uncompromising abstraction, with no remnants of representational imagery, is here the perfect fit for a self that has overcome biography and narrative, and stays quite close to mystery and to poetry. On the one hand, mystery and enigma constitute all genuine art, which, as Adorno said, always includes something that does not exist in the world. And on the other, far from the coldness that was once attributed to it, free abstraction allows for the plain manifestation of emotions.

Esteve Llorens' art is generated by random encounters with situations, objects, techniques, readings, works by other artists. And at the same time, it embodies previous thoughts and works, each new action being, as George Kubler says, "a compression and replication of the past." She works in two different ways. Sometimes, she is able to see a piece before making it, and it is that original image in her mind that pushes her to

search for the right materials and techniques in order to construct it. At other times, her point of departure is a choice of material. In these cases, she relies on chance, working her way through, feeling it rather than seeing it, in a state of highly awakened intuition.

In *Studies for Future Objects*, the two methods were there from the very beginning. The installation consists of a giant tridimensional grid at the center of a room, surrounded by textiles mounted on the four walls. After selecting the material (cotton), Esteve Llorens wove it into swaths, which she cut and combined in a sort of *collage* or assemblage of soft material. As she wove on, an original image was also there, operating consciously or not during the entire process of construction. It was the image of a cardboard box divider that intrigued her since she found it, some time before. (In turn, I find myself intrigued by the relation between the box divider in the center and the textiles on the wall.)

Mounted close to each wall, panels of padded textiles of raw and dyed cotton show a few distinct forms. They are organized in pairs of the same color. Each piece is a reversed replica of the other, each one can function as figure and as background. The color of raw cotton, I learn, is light ochre, while the dyed cotton here can be green, yellow, gray, orange, pink, greenish blue or magenta. Of course, they are all colors, but my eyes simplify, so I will call the light ochre of raw cotton “non color” or simply “white”.

These textiles form a visual composition that requires a left foot and a right foot, a rhythm as it were, like a dance that alternates color and non color, “I” and “other”, subject and shadow. If on the left, a half oval is pink, on the right, it will be “white”, and vice versa. The reversal alters the perception of dimensions and proportions, something to be expected, since we already know that size, and even shape may change a hue. The pieces themselves are not exactly the same size because the width of each dyed swath depends on the tension with which the artist has woven it, and on the number of threads per warp. I look at the minute alterations between one piece and its corresponding “mate”. I believe I almost see slight shifts suggesting perhaps an

imperceptible mutation that, if replicated enough times, could result in a different shape.

We need movement in space to talk of time. There is right and left, and yet, I find no suggested path to travel these textiles, no after, no before. My eyes appreciate the fabric --its shades, its texture, its thickness--, and are free to roam about. I notice, however, that I look at the figures in the same way I read a text, from left to right, but contrary to the unidirectional reading of words, I go immediately back to the left, and to the right, and to the left again... Positive and negative spaces, simultaneous by nature, exclude all notions of temporal sequence. Rather than in narrative time, these shapes live in the present, where each one is in need of the other in order to exist. It seems a vivid, distinct present, freed from any story, much like what happens in rare moments of meditation. Silence free of noise, awe at each existence, perfect and present, separate and yet intimately related.

Esteve Llorens notes that weaving came to be a perfect fit for her constant traveling. The portability of textiles allowed her to continue working wherever she happened to be at the moment —Mexico, Spain or Austin, Texas. Weaving seems, indeed, a happy choice. However, for a viewer who may not know this biographical detail, textiles evoke something quite different. First, I think that they are at the opposite extreme of an art that might require more conceptualization than time. The making of these textiles is a time-consuming process: from making the dye from natural substances, to dyeing the cotton yarn, to weaving it, to creating the design, to adjusting it to the dimensions allowed by a traditional loom. I then remember the famous *dictum* of Buffon ("Genius is nothing but a great aptitude for patience"). Weaving, quiet energy. It is well known that in some traditions patience is an indispensable epistemological tool. We could well extend the notion from knowing an object to constructing it. The thing, present object or object to be, offers itself to thinking and patience. Only with time we may come to know it or construct it. This is certainly not the agitated Romantic inspiration but the gaze that stays on the object without forcing it.

The loom holds the threads in place. On that hold, repeated, regular motions of

the hands and the yarn give shape to time. Repeated rows of interlaced threads. On the wall and in the box divider, repeated simple forms. Each textile has its own pattern of movement. Recurrent beat as when we breathe and hear our own heartbeat. Pain, pleasure, relief, sadness or obsession, each emotion has its own rhythm, very much like life, very much like the old language of poetry. Patterns of silence (“white”) and sound (the other color), of long and short, of straight and curved. Voice, language, geometry. I live my own experiences, mark them with my own stresses on the time continuum. Rhythm, I now think, is also a feature common to all arts.

Art is a will to form. *Studies* started with the simple union of two cotton swaths (one raw, the other, dyed) sewn together. The artist then cut them in half across the seam, and sewed them together again in another direction. This repeated process of severing and recomposing yielded different geometric shapes. As in other arts, form results here from cutting, choosing, as well as from renouncing. The repetition could have no end, except for the fact that the material will necessarily impose limitations. This recurrent division reminds of Zeno’s paradox of Achilles and the turtle. Esteve Llorens gives material form to the mathematical concept of convergent series and infinite regression. As infinite as the division of the distance separating Achilles from the turtle is potentially the regressive cutting and sewing of the original swath: a serial proliferation of forms and possibilities.

If the swaths suffer a process of reduction, the original grid undergoes a significant enlargement. The found object that intrigued Esteve Llorens long before she started this work was a box divider that could have been used to transport bottles. It was a space divided in equal sections, and all four walls of each compartment—22 in total—were perforated in large oval shapes. But, as I said above, in this installation, the box divider gets enlarged, and this change in dimensions is not inconsequential. Carved each from the wall’s thin surfaces, the ovals actually configure empty spaces, shaped like huge Easter eggs or may be like giant wood darning eggs.

I begin to understand that what Esteve Llorens shows me here is slowly telling me something I have never thought of before. This grid is talking to me about the shape

of something that has no body. I pause. And what would this intangible object be? Well. It could be like the form of a name that escapes me at the moment. Or of a word I have lost (I am sure that it has 3 syllables and starts with a “t” or may be a “d”). Or the exact shape of a forgotten memory. Or the form of bodiless time. The oval holes allow these ghostly shapes to circulate, as time does, through the compartments.

In the textiles I find no temporal sequence. And yet time is present everywhere: in the activity of weaving, which is literally having time in our hands, creating time, touching it, measuring it, accepting it, remembering. Scenes, faces and lives vanish in time. And if they last longer, it is thanks to memory, our sixth sense, sometimes a bit more durable than life. Like these textiles, memory --more than the ear, the organ of music-- travels not necessarily in a historical sequence.

The giant grid, much taller than me, proposes interesting situations. First, the ovals make me think of the moons of an old wardrobe. I look through the absent mirrors and see frames, unexpected angles, reflections and empty spaces playing against each other, some entirely or partially superimposed on others. I feel I am inside a sort of revolving door that mimics motion and yet does not move. And all through the experience of gazing at this grid, I find myself wanting very much to lift a foot and step over the frame of the first empty oval, cross this threshold, the next, and the next.

All textiles in this installation are “happenings” of sorts. And yet, as I look at these colored shapes, I feel they configure a stable world, they have the volume and the texture of things that exist. All declare their condition of fragments, insist on their value as magnified details of a larger design that is not entirely there. I remember it has been said that modern art is montage, where the whole only exists for the sake of its parts. These fragments that reject or ignore time but are made of time, live in freedom from temporal connections, from origins, from the whole that once encompassed them. And yet they also evoke a whole, an origin, a temporal order of things. The individual pieces get repeated, but within a larger frame, their being together is a flash in time. Their shapes are manifestations. Their condition is that of epiphanies that require from us a first response, the simple and never passive act of witnessing. The fragment retrieves

a larger, more encompassing space, and with it, a larger more encompassing time.

Without a message, without passing judgment about life or art, *Studies for Future Objects* has allowed my thinking a breathing time to ponder the fleeting and the eternal, the absolute and the particular, the very stuff we are made of.

Esteve Llorens' work makes visible the aesthetics of the Bauhaus, its understanding of color, its fondness for simple shapes and for abstraction. With the exception, perhaps, of the functionality the Bauhaus cherished. The upholstered panels do not truly cover the walls (there is a 2 inch separation from them), and so, they do not maintain temperature nor do they absorb sound. These textiles are not pieces of clothing nor are they bags or baskets or backpacks. And yet, one could say that these textiles function as containers of time and memory, as ghostly embodiments of the holes in the giant grid. I believe that *Studies for Future Objects* bears witness to Esteve Llorens's own memory, keeps it woven into the cotton swaths and their colored shapes, stitched in its many seams, severed by multiple cuts, recovered in successive new seams. Moving back and forth through the installation, I in turn bear witness to its paradoxical accomplishment: making the flow of time visible and tangible and at once stopping it dead in its tracks.

This text was published on the occasion of the exhibition "Studies for Future Objects".