

# A small space for painting

Hugo Canoilas

Imagine yourself in front of a wet white surface of paper. Now use three different shades of red, which are in front of you, to cover its surface entirely. You shouldn't build images; you shouldn't make a drawing or raise any sort of forms. Allow yourself to sink in; to be part of that surface. The paper is a receptacle for your inner projections. Your interior should become exterior. Other people will place their projections over it.

Thinking about painting today, one needs to reflect on a possible new language. Here I would like to make a direct association with the activities of the Portuguese visual poets in the 1970s, who bridged their new language with the sentences written on the walls and traffic signs during the post-revolutionary period in Portugal. Both the works of the visual poets and the political messages to be found on the streets existed in the space between sign and form.

E. M. de Melo e Castro—who had the amazing experience of seeing his visual poems developed in the laboratory, finding a mirror in the wild movement in the streets over these years—criticised the stagnation of language and the bourgeois use of dead language forms. This use of dead language forms was dubbed paraliterature, a literature made with already established forms of writing, a literature devoid of the disquietude, the will and the hunger to search for a new language.

The new language was, by that time, a fusion between form and meaning, a mimesis between an artistic and political ethos. It was open to the new, and believed in human development and evolution.

The new language sought here is not just unseen or something to come but—as in the 1970s—a form that can again make art a fertile material to hold projections from the world, and re-territorialise it. This idea follows Sartre's perspective of the true intellectual, that knowledge comes from the whole and should be given back to the whole (the people).

I myself wish for an art of the middle, like a matter between things. I believe that the interconnection that can be made between art and all other things is the real material of art. To paraphrase Deleuze & Guattari: it's like pollen, the orchid and the wasp. The wasp carries the pollen from one flower to another and leaves its silhouette printed on the orchid petals.

Dino Zrnec's works search for a new language in painting, through accidents, small surprises and programmes that are open structures, revealing a painting that (like almost all paintings) results from a gesture by the artist but, by the end, becomes something that happens in front of him. Zrnec is then the first to be outside his own work and he needs to enlarge or transform his body in order to embody the events that have happened in front of him and make these paintings part of his discourse.

Apparently devoid of signs, it is tempting to see Zrnec's abstract paintings as a negation of the world out there (the *real politik*). They seem to me to hold qualities of a more intimate relationship with the world than one can expect. This intimate relationship can be explained by the notion of the diagram, a term used in Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Zrnec's paintings are diagrammatic because they carry the chaos and the diversity of the world, something intrinsic to the accidents that produce the paintings. Their lightness makes us believe that there is no thickness of overlapped layers of paint and still one can sense that the layers that build up the picture were erased mentally. These erased layers are all the paintings that have already been made, the denied and loved works, the art events attended, and the social and political input. There is no such

thing as a white canvas or an empty surface since all this data is inside the head of the painter. Before starting to paint, all these layers have to be erased, avoiding the cliché in painting—and as such, in art as well, in order to bring something new.

This happens with an astonishing lightness in Zrnec's work due to his sensitive (not rational) programmes, accidents, gestures that are machines releasing his work from the *forces* of painting. This lightness—the quality of Zrnec and his contemporaries in painting—is reminiscent of the lightness of Pop Art, as if there was something like the constitution of a new ground zero, releasing painting from the heaviness of History. But History can easily be seen in the way paintings evolve between small variations of abstract forms and gestures that make a eulogy to the evolution of abstract painting made through the years, without avoiding a wink towards a potential newness that can only happen by chance.

The diagram is a process of painting with wide input; a form of organising the chaos that comes from the multiplication of events, nowadays maximised in an immeasurable way. Painting is not an anachronistic medium but a contemporary one.

Painting holds the diverse, the chaos, the notion of disaster—something that happens without a centre, without an axis and no pressure to be fully understood. It also occurs without an agenda, whether curatorial or political, pushing the artist towards a certain way of resistance, a certain politics of the self, the basis of a community of difference that demands an autonomous viewer.

The viewer will have to manage two sorts of forces. One that is affirmative, that comes from an interior that aims to become exterior-object, which comes through a series of gestures, scribbles and the use of liquid matter on linen; things that one cannot say or organise in any other way and still are important to what we are; where painting is a form of organising our interior through small impulses. These impulses are taken by the stomach, reorganised through time and create a new form of being in, or seeing, the world.

The second active force of Zrnec's work is the reactive one that is in contact with the exterior. The rational is active in the acceptance of the events—when a painting happens as painting and its display. These two forces do not work separately but are intertwined. This can be understood by the dichotomy between orthogonal and non-orthogonal forms, or soft and hard matter.

To see is, here, more difficult than to make; and looking at something is more revolutionary than making it.

Zrnec's process-based paintings hold that chaos from the world and aim to transform the viewer through a new form, not idealised, not possible to figure out—that is there in front of the viewer to look and see. These works are more platforms to experience than things to understand or stages of development for each one of us. Existing between the head and the stomach, these works are meant to get in through the diaphragm. The diaphragm is the small space for painting.

**Hugo Canoilas'** work is strongly linked to the art historical evolution of early Modernism. Drawing upon the philosophy, poetry and foundational ideologies of this period Canoilas employs a wide variety of media informed predominantly by painting. Canoilas' work seeks to represent a political and aesthetic convergence and moves towards a sensitisation of the viewer to the sociopolitical undercurrents that influence historical and contemporary culture. Hugo Canoilas was born in 1977 in Lisbon, Portugal and studied at Caldas da Rainha, Portugal and the Royal College of Art, UK. Recent solo Exhibitions include: 'Mirror seas', Discoveries section with Workplace Gallery at Art Basel Hong Kong, HK in 2014 and 2013 'Fierce: Riding the wave fiercely with no fear', Workplace Gallery London; London, UK; 'Ve.sch', Gallery Nosbaum&Reding, Luxembourg, LU; 'Wound', Ve.Sch, Vienna, AT; 'Spirit of the air', Wiener Art Foundation hosted by Kunstbuero, Vienna, AT. 'Magma', Workplace Gallery, Newcastle, UK. He participated in several group shows, e. g. 30th Biennial of São Paulo, BR; Chiado Museum, Lisbon, PT; CAM-Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, PT; Galeries Poirel – FRAC Lorraine, Metz, FR, ICA, London, UK, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, DE. Hugo Canoilas lives and works in Vienna, Austria.