

INTERVIEW

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN PATRICIA DAUDER AND MARÍA MINERA.

MM: I would like to start off with a question that has to do with beginnings. Some artists need to circle and circle before reaching the territory in which they finally start to move ahead; others intuit what that zone of practice might be and appropriate it from the beginning. At this stage, your work suggests a clarity of movements (and I do not mean strategies, but displacements and decisions that immediately reveal the existence of a quest – every quest taking place always somewhat in the dark – while there are also certain parameters within which you move), and perhaps this was not always the case. Would you like to talk about where you would situate the beginning?

PD: My artistic education began in the early 1990s in Barcelona and continued in the Netherlands, where I lived for two years and a half in the late 1990s. It was there that I showed my work for the first time, and where I continued to work and exhibit regularly ever since.

At the internal level, I have lived the development of my ideas in a much slower way. It could be that from the outside my work seems to have followed a certain logic, but I did not experience it like that and to recognize the territory that I was moving across took me quite a while. This is probably due to the fact that my work process is based more upon intuition than planning. I never work based on projects, systems or predefined themes, I always follow a very processual method that remains open to randomness, with very slow productions during which artisanal making and the contact with materials are crucial. This was already taking place in the mid 1990s as I started to produce a set of works that I consider relevant to my later development. In those moments, to express myself with agility and speed and to capture a gesture or an action were of the essence. Which is why I felt more at ease with drawings and models, with the idea of sketch and fragment more than with that of a finished and defined work. In the drawings, the series of photographs and the small three-dimensional models I started to represent fragmented anthropomorphic forms, bodies that were unfinished and in the process of transformation. In the drawings the bodies were modelled according to the repetition of lines, which were always circular and represented the same object although from different angles, as if describing an accumulation of layers or stages of a movement. Rupture, metamorphosis and movement were equally present in the photographic series, which also featured as protagonist a human body that was not seen in full, that appeared transformed or camouflaged and was photographed in different facets succeeding one another in a way resembling a cinematographic sequence. This kind of bodily formalizations that I made towards the late 1990s dematerialized little by little and I began to place a greater importance on the process than on representation itself.

MM: So the will to represent waned, but it did not vanish altogether. I would even dare say that that is one of your central themes: how to continue to represent — to produce meaning, so to speak — after representation — understood from the perspective of twentieth century abstractionists, with whom, in this instance, you share kinship, through a clear renouncing of figuration. You yourself claimed an interest in ‘representing beyond the immediate vicinity of the physical and objectual world’. However, this urge cannot but express itself as conflict, as paradox: how to represent what cannot be represented? I would like you to tell me about that ‘beyond’. What is it made of? Is it related to abstraction?

PD: Some of my concerns are directed at a physical dimension. When I allude to a ‘beyond’ I am thinking of matter and its states, even if that matter is not necessarily visible: also light, space, void and time are matter. To see beyond the apparent and the immediate that is before me in the present moment. To discover or intuit the inner structure and material properties of an object or space — large or small, micro or macroscopic; be it a salt crystal, a building, or the formation of clouds — and the almost imperceptible exchanges that occur in their material states. I always had the feeling that nothing is stable or compact; that everything is in motion, under the influence of constantly changing natural or artificial cycles and processes, invisible to our senses but nevertheless existent. Because of this feeling of instability, I see the solid, the unified and the compact as something problematic. Perhaps for that reason, many of my works are the result of a sum of parts, like a puzzle of forms, or a sequence, without a clear beginning or end.

On the other hand, I am fascinated by the history of the representation of the unseen, of the imagined; especially in what concerns space, the Earth and other cultures — be it through maps, cosmologies, constellations, etc. — and how mankind’s image of the world was built upon intuition or cultural preconceptions. The visualization of the unknown. However that which one projects mentally sometimes bears no connection to a concrete physical reality. There are some works that I am unable to link to anything specific, especially certain drawings. These are some of my references, which do not always find a direct representation in my work; instead, they are ideas latent in drawings, canvases, films and sculptures. Representation is a complex issue. When I start drawing on a paper, capturing something with the camera or modelling a shape in space, I start from a very incipient mental projection regarding subjective perceptions or sensations that I cannot represent with a clear-cut morphology. From then on a broad process of manufacture begins that runs alongside an equally broad process of recognizing the image or the object. Sometimes I feel that the form or the image dictate which steps to follow regardless of my will and that a gap appears between what is evoked and the real form.

MM: Thus, in what concerns things, it is perhaps not so much about a ‘beyond’ as it is about a greater ‘depth’ or ‘closeness’. Although, of course, the closer to things one stands, the less clear the sensible form of the observed object becomes. A sort of indeterminacy principle seems to be at work here. And I ask myself whether that is somehow connected with the issue of self-reference you have alluded to in other occasions. What I mean is that by losing direct reference to the original object (the building, the cloud, the salt crystal) what emerges is an indeterminate, uncertain form bearing a relationship to itself alone. Would this be a form of autonomy of the artwork?

PD: To observe what surrounds me is a natural part of my work process, but I do not usually make a direct representation of what I observe. Nor am I interested in the specificity or particularity of a real object. When I draw a leaf, a building, or a space, I draw an idea of a leaf, building or space, but none in particular that I might have seen. I do not

start from an existing initial object. I start from an idea related to that object. The images that I create, whether or not they are more or less identifiable forms, are a synthesis of an idea or perception in my head.

To make it clearer, I will give an example of a recent work. In 2010 I made a show titled 'Teahupoo' in which I brought together drawings, slide projections and a 16 mm film projection. Teahupoo is a Tahitian word for one of the biggest and most powerful waves in the world, which forms on the eponymous beach on the island of Tahiti, in French Polynesia. In my imagination, Teahupoo represents the power of the image, an icon of the biggest wave, but it is also a symbol of absolute beauty and of the idea of paradise. It is a mental projection that unleashes a set of images. The exhibited drawings in particular, which were in various sizes and techniques, evoked at times the colours of the colour drawings of the tropical vegetation or the intense light of dusk, with references to natural elements such as leaves, clouds or the moon. These more referential drawings cohabited with drawings that were entirely made of gradations in different intensities of graphite lines. Not all the works in the show had been made while thinking of *Teahupoo*, the toponym, the place, or the wave, but all of them share something that *Teahupoo* symbolizes for me: the distance between the imagined and the real, between the represented and the real experience, as well as the possibility or impossibility of expressing that distance through the image.

Paradoxical as it may seem, something similar happens with the films. So far, I made different types of films — some with drawings and most of them with 'real image'. Among them, some could be defined as more abstract than others because the real reference is lost. But even in the case of the more 'realistic', so to speak, such as *Les Maliens (a film)*, shot entirely with landscape scenes from Mali, I do not make a real representation of a place, but of an ideal one. One sees a succession of landscapes of an African country, but they offer no information on anything, they are not a document.

In the above examples, I do not think that the ideas or sensations that I have about a given image can be perceived by the viewers, instead, they find themselves before something undefined, something that could be but in fact is not, and I believe that this viewer-object relation is interesting. When I mention the self-referentiality of the artistic image or object I do not refer to it in terms of figuration or abstraction, I refer to the fact that I have the feeling, strange as this may seem, that that object is something in itself, an autonomous being that needs not be subordinated to an identifiable object so as to have meaning. Randomness plays an important role in its development. It is as if the work followed a path that is independent from my decisions. In that sense, you are right when pointing out that what emerges is an indeterminate, uncertain form that bears a relationship to itself alone. Non-form predominates in my work, but I have no intrinsic interest in abstraction in the historical sense; I am interested in non-form, in the unclassifiable and the unnameable of which I think the artistic object partakes a lot.

MM: For those of us who do not use imagination to such an extent it is difficult to conceive of the path leading to non-form. Would you like to expand on this? What is the process that leads you to these images, which, as you say, are so hard for the viewer to define?

PD: If there is a path leading to non-form it does not unfold in a single work, but across the years and across my oeuvre, my work de-formalizing progressively and slowly, but we are never fully aware of this as it happens, that awareness only comes with distance. I would say that a key moment in this progression took place between the years 2000 and 2004, when my gaze ceased to focus on the individual to lock into what surrounds the individual, the outside. Following the unfinished figurations of individuals in the drawings

of the late 1990s, I started to represent bodies that were single volumes, a sort of rounded forms that in turn I disintegrated little by little as well. Already at the time I was no longer interested in the individual, turning towards deconstruction as the central subject of the works; literal representations of explosions, destroyed architectural spaces and decadent landscapes. The rupture was still present, but now it unfolded in space.

Little by little I began to think about the representation of space and the passage of time in the work itself; a space that I saw as infinite and without parameters. I think that this spatial and temporal concept has always been present in my work. Although in the early years it did not develop as a theme in itself, I recall the representation of sequential phases as something usual already in my early works.

The incorporation of new media, such as sculpture and slide projections, as well as the increase in size of the drawings that occurred between 2000 and 2002, contributed enormously to this process towards non-form. I could say that both the content and the continent gradually disaggregated. The fact of standing before a canvas or sheet of paper of two or three metres stretched on the wall or on the floor implied a new physical relationship to the medium, which differed from the approach when sitting at a table in front of a folio. I somehow started to associate the space of the paper to an infinite space. It had to do with approaching a large extension, without much detail just by approaching it. Then, images emerged that little by little reminded me of atmospheres and maps. Not that I started to work thinking about atmospheres or maps, just that the idea occurred to me after having made already a few drawings.

In 2004 my idea no longer was to represent anything in concrete, but to act upon the surface. Inevitably, as the idea of non-form comes around, the material aspects of what we have before us gained a sudden relevance — the paper, the pigment, the reaction and erosion of the materials, etc. Something important takes place at that moment that issues from that material subordination to the support, an aspect which was key to the development of the ideas in subsequent and current works: to work by subtraction rather than by addition. To smear, to eliminate, to scratch, to sand down, or to blacken an image became crucial actions. What I do is to empty an image and create a second image from that.

MM: I can understand how that 'emptying' works in the case of drawings, but what happens in the case of cinema? Indeed, when confronting your films we have the feeling that they are drawings, although in most cases they are actually impressions taken directly from the objective world. Maybe this is related to the medium you chose, i.e. 16 mm film, and to its peculiar visual quality. Would you say they are fixed forms that acquire movement or is it a quest that differs completely from drawing? How did you get there?

PD: I got to cinema precisely through drawing. The idea of starting to work with analogical film came to me because in 2004 I was doing a series of drawings, which I repeatedly drew and smeared, and over the same paper a variety of images was emerging. It was difficult for me to decide the moment in which the drawing was finished and, besides, I felt that the final image was not as important as the progression of the whole range of images. I needed to record them so as to document the mental associations I made while drawing, and to paste them together in motion to see the months-long development reduced to a small fraction of time. It occurred to me to buy a Super 8 camera and shoot frame by frame. I felt attracted to the cinematographic mechanism, I wanted to know how a cinematic image formed and what were the material qualities of celluloid. My aim was not to build a logical animation, but to shoot what took place in front of me spontaneously and to contract real time.

The initial urge to take a cinema camera was in fact an intention to visualize something that I could not see in real time. What led me from shooting drawings to shooting exteriors was a desire to bring practice out of the studio, to go outside, to observe and take notes with the camera as if it were a pencil. All the films that followed the first two films of drawings, *Abstract Film #1* and *Abstract Film #2*, except for *March 5th 1979* — which was made from photographs — and *Les Maliens (a script)* — which was about drawings —, were shot outside with the intention of exploring or simply witnessing surroundings that were either familiar or quite unknown to me. Nevertheless, all of them are pervaded by a desire to see beyond the immediate, beyond the reach of our eyes. But this does not mean that all that appears in the films are blown up or distorted microscopic forms. There is an abundance of landscapes and ordinary vistas but the time factor has a marked relevance in them, with the intention of offering a contemplative experience that leads us to attentively observe through long sequences where nothing happens (in fact, they seem like photographs with a touch of movement). In some films, the manipulation of time, through the variation of image recording speeds in the camera, creates a distorted image of an event and offers an unusual vision of it.

I often hear the comment that the films resemble the drawings, but when I grab the camera I do not think at all about drawings, it is just something that happens without any premeditation. What I do afterwards, at the time of showing the works, is to simultaneously present films, drawings, canvases, slides and sculptures, with the aim of facilitating a reading that is simultaneous and open to possible associations between the different works, even if they are not directly related. Up until now I have worked in Super 8 and 16 mm, and the density of colour and grain of the film are certainly an essential aspect. Indeed, in certain cases it is as important as the filmed subject. However, this also takes place in any of the works that I do in other media, where the material aspect is fundamental.

My films do not have a literary base. They are more akin to photography or primitive cinema. I believe that the previous works with slides, as well as many of the films, stand at the threshold between fixed image and moving image, they move within a neutral territory. To me there is not that much difference between what we classify as static and what we classify as movement. These are quite relative parameters, which depend on our perception ability. The illusion of a moving image actually takes place due to a neurologic question, it is produced in our brain and in my opinion it is just a matter of active contemplation, whether standing before a painting or watching a film.

On the other hand, I have never worked by exclusively focusing on only one work, a drawing, a canvas, etc. I always worked on several at once, observing them and establishing relationships between them, even when they are not yet finished. I think that different pieces actually often constitute only one work, which in the end resembles the structure of cinema. Another particularity of my work is that I usually make visual schemes composed of many images. Some of them constitute prior stages to the making of a film, but in certain cases I just make them for their own sake. On the other hand, I would say that many of the installations of recent shows are also visual schemes translated into an exhibition space.

MM: Tell me more about these visual schemes. Does the specificity of a site interest you? Your exhibitions reveal a very clear concern with grouping the works together so that the sum total also has a meaning, or even its own narrative. More than working on specific pieces, artists increasingly work on groups of things that connect to each other in various ways. Is that your case?

PD: My work followed that process since the beginning. I have always worked by producing several pieces at the same time, never concentrating on a single one, so that in my studio various images-in-process start to accumulate that seem to complement each other in spite of the fact of not maintaining a direct relationship. With time, by repeatedly looking at them, the feeling of complementariness grows and I project upon them a series of possible subterranean associations that go beyond their formal aspect and their chronology. In a certain way, I create a sort of montage of different times, a narrative. When the work goes from the studio to the exhibition space it is more crucial for me to reflect the work process than to interact with the specific site. In the final installation of the set of works, and alongside the possible links that the viewer may find between the images and the objects shown, a sensation of suspended time is created.

This probably bears a certain relation to the sketch and unfinished aspects that pervade many of my works. I often feel that what takes shape, for instance in a drawing, continues in another and so on. It is an open and continuous process. I think it is logical that numerous artists are working with these premises since the integrity, monumentality and physical aspect of the artistic object gradually broke down throughout the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, which brought about a way of working that seems to address a flow of ideas rather than the completion of a work.

MM: However, within that continuous process of work (of which the works seem to be by-products) there may still be a sense of direction — can you see where you are heading now?

PD: There are issues that concern me about my work that may bring about new formulations. The issue of narrative is one of them. My work is unlikely to see much change because I am not a storyteller, but I do feel a need to further investigate the flow of images and ideas, both in film and in two-dimensional works. I am looking for a way to create fluidity or continuity between the parts. I think that the structure of my work will move towards a greater cohesion of the different elements.

I have been considering for some time how to explain a particular feeling without resorting to the representation of chronologically ordered events in the films. I feel the need for longer durations and to overcome a cut-upon-cut and fixed camera system to obtain greater continuity, raccord, or fluidity between the various sequences perhaps by resorting to images, time and maybe sound. This search for a greater continuity exists also in two-dimensional works. The way in which I have been recently working with drawings is somehow close to a hieroglyph, or to the construction of a sort of visual lexicon. This is the feeling I have, although I am not sure that in the end this will bring about a result that is very different from what I have been doing so far. What we sometimes feel as a major step can in fact be nothing but a tiny movement.