

FAR FROM HOME

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"For me drawing is the way in which volume cuts the edge of things. The inside and the outside are both drawn. It is on this thin line where drawing takes place (...) I'm more interested in feeling than image (...) If you want to understand how an artist thinks, you have to look at their drawings." Richard Serra.

Drawing, among many other definitions, can be seen as a frail-looking medium that brings together ideas, thoughts and reflections captured in images, sometimes as a diary. As Marcel Proust put it, the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

Contemporary artists travel. They are invited to take part in residences and their work is often based on, or is strongly influenced by, this mobility, in part desired, in part forced, but always necessary to develop and disseminate their work in different places and exhibitions.

As a traveller, the first impressions of a new place, fresh in the mind, can be immediately translated into a sketch in a notebook, in a note, which will serve as the basis for a more elaborate work later on or will simply become a souvenir. It means discovering and reflecting what is new, encounters and situations that lead to short or long stories about an experience as a person and as an artist. The freshness of a field diary, reflection conducted outside the routine work studio.

Travelling to places can spark creativity. Reality and fiction are blended in first impressions that have an impact, surprise or bring to mind memories of places already seen and experiences previously had.

Some artists make travelling into a way of living and working. This not belonging to any place is linked to immediacy. It is here where paper, the drawing on it, can achieve a prominence above other media. This does not detract from its practicality owing to its lightness and portability.

As a diary and means of reflection, drawing enables a kind of adaptation to the place and subsequently also reconstructs vivid memories of a travel experience. Between the real and the imaginary, the evocative in its content will be interpreted in a literal or abstract way by the viewer, following the guidelines and clues that the author has left as explicit or ambiguous traces.

Mobility, flight from the centre and exile of no return are common themes in contemporary lifestyle. The world has had no centre for a long while. Being always on the road, not having a point to come back to, can become an everyday situation.

This growing contemporary mobility of art has radically altered its mode of perception. There is no longer enough time for the initiatory Grand Tour that artists used to go on in the 18th and

19th centuries once in their lives and which lasted for between one and two years. An artist's travels today are counted in days, at most weeks. Even drawing while travelling is as antiquated as sending letters and postcards. The notion of presence and absence is completely disrupted, in other words it no longer exists. Communication and movement are now constant, regardless of where you are. Many artists today say they "aren't from anywhere". The goal moves continuously. The goal is to move continuously.

The mechanisms of memory, sensitivity and understanding are not always triggered automatically or function properly just because you travel to somewhere else in the world and enter a new setting. They also can be blocked. But usually the artist fuses the feeling of pressure with one of relaxation and is especially attentive to what is new. The action of travelling activates the creative instinct and this helps the artist to adjust to a new location and reset their position in space by rearranging social thoughts about adaptability to the new territory.

The invitation to a temporary residence, a biennial or an exhibition far from home opens up idyllic perspectives that may then turn out to be full of pitfalls and disappointments, and at all events situations that are never premeditated. *"Few things are as exciting as the idea of travelling somewhere else. But the reality of travel seldom matches our daydreams. The tragicomic disappointments are well-known: the disorientation, the mid-afternoon despair, the lethargy before ancient ruins. And yet the reasons behind such disappointments are rarely explored."* Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*

A stranger in a situation of transit, in a residence or subsequently in their own studio, it is the artist who sets the tales of a trip with their own rules. Reflection in a travel diary between solitude and company. Some of the works in this exhibition recall and refer to the trip, while others are the result of it and do not directly allude to the topic. They have merely been created "far from home".

Ricardo Alcaide (Caracas, Venezuela, 1967) presents a work made up of several drawings and a model. *Not Anywhere* is about architecture in its most ephemeral representation. It relates unspecific perspectives within a broader work by the artist entitled *Looking for my own Space*. The elements that compose the pieces are of an almost ephemeral cut, made of cardboard, in a very careful and sober way, forming a kind of three-dimensional model or display of a temporary structure, as a travelling sanctuary, accompanied by basic drawings showing its abstraction. These extremely sober drawings made in ink on white paper are projected imaginary forms of architecture, the definition of an abstract physical space, and references to the possible construction variations in the model. This model is made of two pieces of cardboard and one of wood that can compose various forms of construction, based on the three

elements from which it originates, collected in three different cities that the artist often visits: Sao Paulo, London and Madrid. They thus make up an indefinite architecture, referring to a non-place. *A Place to Hide* is a previous series from 2009 in which Alcaide also referred to the idea of shelter, of searching for a personal place, always abstract, always utopian, ephemeral and built of humble materials such as paper, cardboard, wood, fabric and other discarded and reused items.

Carlos Alemany (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1981) presents a silent animation loop entitled *Estado de transitoriedad*, 2011, made from simple line drawings which in turn relate an everyday occurrence; a road trip by car, a journey that places us in the vehicle, overtaking trucks, leaving behind the asphalt and moving forward in an endless driving experience. Lights, traffic signals, petrol stations, tunnels and other features that line the motorway are reflected in our retinas when we travel by car, but we barely pay them the attention required for driving to be performed as it should. Thousands of signs and messages pass us by in a state of transience, as Alemany indicates with the title of his work which lasts only a few seconds, those needed to recognise them and remove them from our minds, leaving space for the next identifiable message on the road. It is a miniature road movie that the artist defines as “moving painting” and which looks at our relationship with space and time, perception and the ephemeral nature of messages. These are topics which are all included in a subject that interests the artist in the rest of his work, which is contemporary travelling and mobility in an interurban landscape in the 21st century.

Ignacio Chávarri (Madrid, 1982). The three drawings in gouache on recycled paper by this artist, entitled *Dibujos satélite (Sobre lo poliédrico del tiempo)*, 2010, have the twofold idea of accumulation and overlap as their reference point and were done on his return from a residency at the Kuultturikaupila centre in a village in the north of Finland in October, November and December 2009. Below is an excerpt from the conversation between Ignacio Chávarri and Bernardo Sopolana, published in issue no. 0 of *Iceberg* on the occasion of the exhibition by the artist in the Ibero-American Institute of Finland in Madrid in March 2011:

BS. What do you think about when approaching an exhibition?

IC. I always consider the venue, as I think the context is crucial in articulating an exhibition project.

BS. Is an exhibition for you the culmination of the creative process or a part of it?

IC. In some ways it's both. In one way I see it as a conclusion, although in this particular case the project was begun in Finland and has been developed over several exhibitions. Each of the works has changed...

BS. As for the residencies you've done, how do you deal with places that are completely unrelated to your usual environment?

IC. *Getting out of my usual context always enriches the way I deal with a project. Your head works differently in new dynamics and new landscapes. I like to go without a concrete idea and create from out of that strangeness.*

BS. *How have these residences influenced your normal production?*

IC. (...) *In the case of Japan, it was the first time I'd worked with other artists in the same space and sharing the creative process and discussing it at the time it was going on was very rewarding. However, I spent most of my time in Finland alone in the studio, so isolation was a key factor in the research for the project.*

BS. *When does a residence end?*

IC. *Although residences have a concrete time and space, in some ways these experiences expand until you finally complete the project.*

Fernando García (Madrid, 1975) also did a six-month residence in Jyväskylä in Finland in 2009 with a grant from the Pépinières Européennes Pour Jeunes Artistes. During that time he produced a number of works in various media, a lot of them coming out of his interest in a language that is as different from Spanish as Finnish is, and many of them were drawings of what he saw and felt and drawings he required to communicate. Some time after he got back, he carefully reviewed much of that corpus of drawings in his new studio in Madrid, saving some pictures while deciding to turn others into something new. This transformation is so radical that the original drawings are hidden under a black paper collage cloud, like dark snow deposited on the originals which, without disappearing, are encrypted for their author's memory only, as there is no way we will be able to see them again, nor have we ever viewed them. These drawings come from a series entitled *Obra Equivocada #014 (Homenaje a Stuart Sutcliffe)*, Madrid 2011.

Karlos Gil (Toledo, 1984) presents two laser information graphics on paper titled *Speech Variation #1. Schema for immanent structures. (Rectangle, line, circle, shape)* and *Speech Variation #2. The Lightweight theory. (Inversion, rhythm, oscillation, phased out)*, made in the summer of 2011 in New York based on a research project at a number of artistic, scientific and university institutions in the city as part of the interest in science fiction addressed in all Karl Gil's work. As a musical composition, each drawing is a sum of nine scores that represent conversations and abstract ideas, embodied in modular symbols based on a system of encryption like the one used by Ligeti in *Artikulation*, an electronic composition he created in 1958. Ligeti began working with electronic music in his studio in Cologne, interested in forms of sounds with a similarity to language in the way the latter is structured: questions and answers, high and low voices, continuous and interrupted speech, etc. Ligeti decided to use different

sounds depending on the actual structure of syllables, words, sentences, texts and languages. Measuring each sound with spectrophotometers and spectral synthesis processes, each form and each colour corresponds to the sound language reading. Rainer Wehinger and Gyorgy Ligeti created a machine called AK-001-TON to read the system of encrypted symbols in an aural score. The machine functioned like a simultaneous translator and performed a synthesis equation between sound and its graphical representation to achieve a genuine grammatical result. In his research in New York about the composer, Karlos Gil discovered that Gyorgy Ligeti had been proposed to create an encrypted communication system for NASA, and went back to his system for the transcription of graphical code messages to represent an interpretation of the use of obsolete technology that contains a hidden message for the reader-viewer as a paradigm of the conflict between reality and fiction.

Miki Leal (Sevilla, 1974) gives us the opportunity to see two works in different media which are both the result of experiences far from home. To begin with, and as a first in his pictorial work, there is a video he made on the road with his mobile phone during a motorcycle trip in the summer of 2008 through France and Germany to visit the houses of Le Corbusier on the Côte d'Azur and Heidegger in the Black Forest, a journey he undertook with the help of a grant from Caja Sol. Then along with this he also presents drawings that come from his travel notes made in his Moleskine diary as sketches and then tidied up some time later on. It ranges from the innocence of the video, filmed in the style of the early silent films but using 21st century technology and in colour and reminiscent of *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, to the classic beauty of the four watercolours that accompany it, which are also sketches of the French Riviera.

Guillermo Mora (Alcalá de Henares, Madrid, 1982) made the pieces presented in this exhibition during the final part of his stay as a fellow at the Rome Academy last year in 2011, a city where he has stayed on to live. The works are composed of small pieces of paper assembled by hand and taken from drawings, remains of trial sculptures and other projects never completely abandoned, as is the usual basis for his work. They are pieces of paper whose main feature is the multiple opportunities they offer for exhibition. They can change their position and size on being handled, allowing each person to create a piece as they wish in this intervention that provides a completely different "drawing" for each work with a simple hand movement. Any small change alters them enormously in their aesthetic appearance and their spirit as an artistic work. Mora puts it this way: "They are pieces of paper that have a lot of architecture and construction process in them, and come out of turning complex remains into pieces that draw basic elements of the drawing. I would like to continue with this idea in later projects."