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The slow procession towards a consolidated historiography around the first decade of Argentine art in the 21st century has just begun to produce some effects, secondary and modest. In particular, and this essay focuses on this one effect, that procession assists us in the task of unveiling the meanings in which the artistic culture that emerged after the end of the 2000s could be differentiated from its previous historical, formal and discursive avatar.

Texts of different kinds but with a similar matrix¹ compulsively quote the *famous* intervention of Marcelo Pombo (Buenos Aires, 1959) when, in an unpublished dialogue with Inés Katzenstein, he stated that the decade of the 2000s had simply not existed². This statement, which in addition to being famous is flamboyant, was aimed at pointing out a semiotic void, an atomized esthetic program, a collective incapacity for institution-building, a rupture with localisms, etc. Perhaps closer to a scriptural rigor of history, Katzenstein allows herself to add that the 2000s did not exist because "[they were] neither thought nor interpreted"³. But let us speculate: from *where* was Pombo saying that there had been no decade? From where was he speaking? From the trench of the past, the 1990s? From the future, WWII? Floating in a space-time interstice, like a piece of cookie floats in a cup of milk tea? It may seem funny, but this could perhaps be the most fitting characterization: Pombo with a robe and outstretched wings, imitating the Angel of History, weightless over the ruins of catastrophe and waving his hands in esoteric choreographies in order to wake the dead. In fact, one of the most dazzling works of his already dazzling pictorial production during this "nonexistent decade" is the one entitled *Segundo concilio de Nicea* [*Second Council of Nicaea*], in which he refers, perhaps with some nostalgia, to the moment in which a woman conspired to veto the political-spiritual condemnation that weighed on the veneration of images in the Catholic world.

Besides the fact that Pombo produced many of his best works -byzantine and scatological⁴- during the 2000s, and besides the fact that many, many other artists

¹ Ferreiro, Jimena (2015). RE: DOS.000: o la década que nunca existió. Buenos Aires: *Revista Otra Parte*. Retrieved from: <https://www.revistaotraparte.com/discusion/re-dos-000-o-la-decada-que-nunca-existio/> Iglesias, Claudio (2014). *Falsa conciencia: ensayos sobre la industria del arte*. Santiago de Chile, Chile: Metales pesados.

² Katzenstein, Inés (2010). Trash: una sensibilidad de la pobreza y la sobreinformación. In Fernando Farina and Andrés Labaké (Eds.). *Poéticas contemporáneas - Itinerarios de las artes visuales en la Argentina de los 90 al 2010* (pp. 33-38). Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo Nacional de las Artes.

³ *Id.*

⁴ I am referring to his movement towards expressionist disorder and gestural abstraction that can be seen in some of his enamel paintings from the period 1999-2008, where among more placid and controlled images (*Bodhisatva joven y naufrago* [*Young and Stranded Bodhisattva*], 2006; *El ciervo de la pintura* [*The Deer of Painting*], 2007) appear compositions inscribed in a metaphysics of disaster and the end of times (*La batalla suave entre el sol y la tierra* [*The Soft Battle Between the Sun and the Earth*], 2004; *Segundo concilio de Nicea* [*Second Council of Nicaea*], 2008; *La pinacoteca de los pobres* [*A Painting Gallery for the Poor*], 2008, among others). Certain structural elements of this period also refer to Byzantine mosaics and iconographic paintings, chromatically very rich and with a particular treatment of space and bodies, always flat. This treatment was oriented, according to André Grabar, to "place the sacred forms in a world of light without time and space, and to capture, in the most ideal way, a transcendental character". See Grabar, André (2007). *Los orígenes de la estética medieval*. Madrid, Spain: Siruela.

produced many, many other remarkable works in those years as well, the most compelling proof that the decade did indeed exist is not art itself but the fact that, after the 2000s, it becomes difficult not only to indulge in the veneration of images -which are now everywhere and being produced by everyone- but also to refer to any kind of field authority. Pombo pointed out, in real time and attended by a curator of absolute preeminence, that the same authorizing network that collected his testimony was becoming obsolete. The actors of this hyperconcentrated local network (critics, academic theorists, curators, publications, collectors and, above all, other artists) were losing ground and traction during the 2000s, in tune with an incipient but progressive disintegration of the very idea of art, increasingly "pluralistic" and "democratized" as a reflection of the global economic order and Internet aesthetics.

The 2000s was the decade that witnessed the collapse of folk authorities, those figures capable of mediating between art and political, institutional and symbolic spaces; the proper names that had something to say, the ideas that were inscribed, verbatim, in the memory of a common culture, began to evaporate in the face of the deterritorialized autonomization of artistic activity. But it is precisely because the folk authority still had a voice to narrate the pains of its own extinction that we can say that the 2000s did happen.

Although later on different periodical artifacts, designed to record in detail the course of Argentina's artistic culture, tried to regain some kind of discursive authority⁵, never again did an artist, a critic or a curator say anything that could be unanimously considered *famous*, because unanimity on art matters turned largely elusive. It could be said that the 2000s existed because Pombo denied them and someone listened to him, quoted him and then quoted him again; but after the 2000s, denying, listening to and quoting the maxims of a bald gentleman are all things that ceased to mean anything to art, because folk authorities vanished, floating like angels of history above a circle of institutionalized ruins.

The paradoxical framework for Pombo's assertion is that his nonexistent decade was recorded in the popular narrative as "the won decade". It was during the first years of Kirchnerismo that the macroeconomic context favored an accelerated development of contemporary art as a viable cultural language for Argentina, especially in the City of Buenos Aires. The work of -among others- Luciana Lamothe, Diego Bianchi and Leopoldo Estol has already been described as corollaries of the postcrisis, but in a general level we understand that the recomposition of the social and productive fabric after the 2001 debacle also produced institutional movements

⁵ Among the publications disputing the space of editorial folk authority vacated by *Ramona* and, to a lesser extent, *Otra Parte*, we could list the last period of the magazine *Mancilla* (2017-2019), *Revista Jennifer*, *Segunda Época*, *Boba*, *Un pequeño deseo*, etc.

of magnitude, condensed in a span of just two or three years: the fourth edition of the Beca Kuitca (which also, for the first time, implied a line of academic continuity with the Rojas); the prominence of Diana Aisenberg's workshop-clinic (another folk authority that helped bringing the decade into existence⁶); the Arteba-Petrobras Award; the creation of the Castagnino+MACRO museum; the new collectionism⁷, and so on⁸.

This series of effective transformations of the institutional landscape obviously had repercussions on the semiotic orientation of the artistic process, giving rise to a phenomenon described as the "professionalization" of the artist and which was an instrumental echo, in turn, of other commoditization processes typical of the globalized world⁹. Aspiring art professionals -a universe that is no longer limited to the artist per se but also includes cultural managers, artwork photographers, renderers, exhibition designers, press agents, gallery producers and receptionists: enemies all of the folk authority- generate an aesthetic code signaled by self-consciousness, that is, by the awareness of existing within a social and economic infrastructure interested in sustaining their practices and sensibilities, which became infinitely varied, infinitely absurd or infinitely insubstantial. For Pombo -in a sensitive reasoning typical of the Beatnik ethos-, art in Argentina becomes nonexistent not only because it distances itself from the image, but also because the institutional universe and official politics recognize and encourage its existence, abducting it from the folk rule¹⁰.

Unlike the Rojas artists, who were subjected to crude definitions and historiographic classifications almost simultaneously with their appearance on the scene, those who forged their practice in the shadow of the socioeconomic transformation processes that characterized the early Kirchnerismo never had any other title than

⁶ During the early 2000s, the pedagogical action of painter Diana Aisenberg left a mark on artists such as Flavia Da Rin, Ad Minoliti, Lula Mari, Florencia Rodríguez Giles, Carlos Huffmann, Mateo Amaral, Mariano Giraud and Pablo Accinelli, among others. Although many of them also participated in the Beca Kuitca, the stay in Aisenberg's workshop-clinic could prolong indefinitely and had more flexible admission policies, so it became an epicenter for the conceptual and affective development of the micro-society of Buenos Aires art.

⁷ The "pluralization" of artistic activity and economic growth also brought a renewal and expansion of the field of art collecting, now focused on the acquisition of works by young artists at low prices.

⁸ Events of particular interest to the author are listed here. For a detailed chronology of the period see Ferreiro, Jimena (2019). *Modelos y prácticas curatoriales en los 90 - La escena del arte en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Librería Ediciones and VV.AA. (2010) *Poéticas contemporáneas - Itinerarios de las artes visuales en la Argentina de los 90 al 2010*. Fernando Farina and Andrés Labaké (Eds.) Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo Nacional de las Artes.

⁹ Rosler, Martha (2013). *Culture Class*. Berlin, Germany: Sternberg Press.

¹⁰ This epochal tension, summarized in terms of "amateurism versus professionalization", was thoroughly analyzed by Inés Katzenstein and Claudio Iglesias in *Misterio-Ministerio. La esfera estética frente al discurso del profesionalismo*, a seminar held during April 2015 at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella and attended by prominent philosophers, critics and curators (among others: Chus Martínez, Graham Harman, Diedrich Diederichsen and Boris Groys). Subsequently, some of these interventions were collected in a book. See VV.AA. (2017) *¿Es el arte un misterio o un ministerio? El arte contemporáneo frente a los desafíos del profesionalismo*. Inés Katzenstein and Claudio Iglesias (Comps.). Buenos Aires, Argentina: Siglo XXI Editores.

"contemporary artists". If the artists of the 1990s were "light", "*guarangos* [a raunchy bunch] in tune with Menem's Argentina", "domestics" or "*putos*" [faggots]¹¹, during the next decade the nomenclature system was optimized to avoid indexing, conceptual and commercial misunderstandings: the artists simply became "contemporary". Evidently, this generalized semantic purge has not only to do with the much-talked-about "end of media specificity", because the interdisciplinary dynamic began to consolidate at least since the late 1980s. The devotion for images, which for Pombo grants ontological entity and political direction to art history, especially in the form of *counterculture*, was replaced by a devotion for the very fact of being an artist, now transformed into a mere *cultural* fact, an undifferentiated reification without nuances.

The logics of style and the historical school, of the collective cores that shared enough esthetic-ideological features to nurture recognizable cultural movements and to erect folk authorities, disappears as of the 2000s, or is too tainted by media imports alien to the traditional apparatus of art. Contemporary artists begin to enunciate themselves from unspecificity, deregulated quotation and fractionation. This enunciation is not only formal but also political: as far as we know, the contemporary artist person can be a leftist Egyptian surrealist, a conservative Brazilian sculptor in favor of the right to bear arms or a feminist video artist from Chaco, heir of the owners of the land. None of these particularities will make up their visuality or their discourse in an essential sense; that discourse will instead be defined by generic transitions and opacities: immediate mutations in tune with the expository languages of a constantly changing present, assimilated through the Internet and thanks to subsidies that allow them to travel around the world. Thus, the contemporary artist becomes a diplomat of the globalist social democracy, an individualized entity with a magic passport issued by the Art Nation.

In Argentina this model (a behavioral model, predicted and prototyped by Guillermo Kuitca) was successfully adopted by artists such as Adrián Villar Rojas, Faivovich & Goldberg, Eduardo Navarro or Tomás Saraceno. The plurality of material and poetic (or antipoetic) languages they exploit testifies to the typical imprecision of the contemporary program, and although it could be said that they all work in a certain register of the monumental, the monumental would be an insufficient title. But these few projects, rightly integrated into the international circuit, had as a counterpart a myriad of other hundreds of aborted artistic systems: individual projects and peripheral protoinstitutional systems that were unable to make the leap outward but

¹¹ See VV.AA. (2013) *Algunos Artistas / 90 — HOY*. Rafael Cippolini (Ed.), Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fundación Proa and Lemus, Francisco (2017). Infancia y temporalidades queer en la Galería del Rojas. *Interalia*, a journal of queer studies, #12: *Among Others – Queer Perspectives in the Hispanic World*, pp.53-69, https://interalia.queerstudies.pl/issues/12_2017/interalia_12_2017_hispanic.pdf

were also unable to speak inward, like a novel written and translated into two languages that are still unknown.

With a less apocalyptic aura than Pombo, author and literary critic Violeta Kesselman states that this is a problem of technical-ideological nature: Argentine literature of the 21st century "does not seem to find a way to write in favor of a historical process"¹² and, instead, chooses to write against that process, compulsively expressing a certain disenchantment with the surrounding world and thus positioning itself "to the right of society". For Kesselman it is less the 2001 crisis than Kirchnerismo the real event that shook the social imagination and enabled new ways of thinking about work, micropolitics, sovereignty and so on. Literature does not find ways to narrate these fluctuations, or it is not interested in narrating them, or it hates and rejects them. Kesselman then seems to affirm that the decade existed beyond literature, whether literature likes it or not: it is the historical-political process that gives substance to abstract time without necessarily requiring a literature sustaining or reflecting this same process. If literature employs inadequate resources and also expresses itself in a reactionary manner, then that is literature's fault; its desire to condemn itself to nonexistence is not our problem (an even tighter interpretation of this formulation would indicate that literature that is written without a link to its own time *exists* but is cynical and "right-wing").

However, there was an Argentine art in the 2000s influenced by both the global relational-utopian program and the local program of civil reconstruction, which would not be so easy to define as "right-wing". This art had a response of euphoric integration in the face of the possibilities of the surrounding world, rehabilitated by the Kirchnerista political model. Not only did the artistic languages undergo considerable transformations as a result of the restructuring of the domestic economy (installations and large format spatial presences were the default options during the "won decade"), but the artists allowed themselves to experiment, to a greater or lesser extent, with the possibility of becoming full-time contemporary artists, with an unprecedented ease and comfort. This role was assumed without guilt within the general social structure and managed to contribute, if only in a naive or insufficient way, to the "mobilized society" that, according to Kesselman, would be located "to the left" of literature.

In any case, to assert so lightly that artists were not right-wing simply because they were able to take advantage of a period of bonanza and successful state management would be the same as saying that society itself was not right-wing because it

¹² Kesselman, Violeta (2013). *Cierta literatura actual, ¿no está a la derecha de la sociedad?* Buenos Aires: interview by the Télam news agency. Retrieved from: <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201308/28235-cierta-literatura-actual-no-esta-a-la-derecha-de-la-sociedad.html>

was able to become bankable, buy a television and replace their smartphones. The real difference with the literature that Kesselman despises, and with the society that demands an iron fist and the opening of commodity markets, perhaps lies in the fact that there were artists capable of perceiving that context and of transforming that perception into systems of effective negotiation with the sociomaterial reality. That is why, if literature was positioned "to the right" of society, art was, on the other hand, an ideal micro-society during Kirchnerismo: in its best moments it tried out new ways not only *to be an artist* but also to integrate itself, by fits and starts, to a superior group.

Managing the imaginary of the post-2001 reconstruction, then, acted as a fertilizer and binder; artists responded to the historical process by integrating themselves to a general and globalized cultural phenomenon but, somehow, this movement also implied an integration to society under different orders (the order of employment and the order of activism, for example). The artists established organic ties not only among themselves, but also with other regional countries; with independent exhibition spaces, galleries, curators and microcommunities; they outlined self-managed commercial initiatives and enjoyed the landscape shaped by the Portoalegrese doctrine, the climax of Mercosur and the imaginary foundation of the "Patria Grande" [Great Homeland]. If the generation of artists and intellectuals born in the late 50s and early 60s fled to Brazil to take refuge from the dictatorship, in the 2000s the globalist language of contemporary art and the political harmony shared at regional level were the factors that formalized that relationship, now sanitized¹³. Images remained confined to their secondary place and the experiential dynamics of "being an artist", in its almost exclusively social dimension, was instituted as the absolute horizon for projects that had not aroused the interest of the international market but found their survival thanks to a barely sufficient domestic market, a barely sufficient institutional system and a barely sufficient general enthusiasm.

Leopoldo Estol (Buenos Aires, 1981) embodied the potential plenitude of the possibilities of contemporary art as a platform for the sensitive experience during this period, continuing a vernacular line that counts among its antecedents' personalities like Alberto Greco, Federico Peralta Ramos and Liliana Maresca. If for the Pombo of the 2000s the mystical property of art lay, as we said, above all in the image, in Estol's case this matter always runs through more postural zones, of *inventionism* and sudden inspiration. Art has a particular objective for Estol, which is to apply "a slight impulse to others"¹⁴, that is to say, a change of sensitive perspective. The form

¹³ See, for example, *Memoria de un cautivo*, performance by Leopoldo Estol in the streets of Rio de Janeiro in 2011.

¹⁴ Estol, Leopoldo (2016). *Extras de los apuntes de Leopoldo*. Córdoba: El gran vidrio. Exhibition text for *Zarpar*. Retrieved from: <http://hipermedula.org/2016/08/zarpar-de-leopoldo-estol/>

of that ballista is not limited to the material object because, art being essentially a matter of faith¹⁵, it can manifest itself in any context and situation, as a miracle catalyzed by the artist's attitude towards existence. A painting, for example, merely serves to preserve remnants of that attitude¹⁶: shards of moral idealism that pollinate the lives of the artist's loved ones when they hang them in their living room or are sold to collectors to ensure economic subsistence. For these artists (who are usually associated with the figures of the "magician", the "demiurge" or the "alchemist") the perfect form of art will always be elusive, because it is transitive: it will disguise itself as a chat, a train ride, a personal journal, a militant action or a party.

Estol's rapid rise as a transitional agent on the scene during the first years of the 21st century could be explained by his ability to bring together two opposing attributes: the typical romanticism of folk authority -where tradition is recognized- and the operative and integrative capacity of the contemporary artist -where the near future seeps in. As a romantic and moral idealist, Estol operates from the void, crossing the "desert of the real" at full speed but protected by a kind of armor, which would be his faith in the inventive capacity of art. Where there is no art (because there are other things: poverty, garbage, indifference), Estol makes it appear, condenses it like damp from his own presence. Thus, far from any spectacular engineering, he takes refuge, first, in the attitudinal: the voice of this folk authority is sustained by social show-downs, more or less grandiloquent poetic gestures, seductions, public polemics, stolen ideas, the general epistemic climate, and so on. When he approaches materiality, he does so from the immediate and the mundane, from things that are within reach or are part of everyday experience, an experience that is generally defined in terms of precariousness and chaos¹⁷. This chaos does not only depend on the sociomaterial context of the country, or the apocalyptic-millennarian climate of the changing times, but also has to do with specific movements of age: when Estol entered the Beca Kuitca, in 2003, he was only 22 years old.

Thomas Hirschhorn had conceptualized the idea of precariousness in the early 90s, but he did it to talk about the condition of his early street works, susceptible to be dismantled, discarded or recycled by passers-by; that is to say, the precariousness is the situation of the work, which is not protected by the institution, the gallery, the

¹⁵ "The difficult thing about being an artist is that livelihood will not necessarily be linked to your practice. You think about any profession and you know that people spend their time and devote their attention to do well what they have to do well, but in art there is no right or wrong". *Id.*

¹⁶ See the *Qué lindo...* series, by Federico Manuel Peralta Ramos.

¹⁷ For example, *Dudas Lujambio*, his 2013 installation at the Buenos Aires art space Naranja Verde, was an absurd device that went against any formal trend of the time, more like the invention of an old scrap dealer than what someone like Tomás Saraceno could make. Composed of a kettle and a "homemade washing machine", it was activated by inserting the hand into a mailbox, powering a motor that filled the space with noise and movement. See: *Dudas Lujambio sale a la cancha de los coleccionistas [Dudas Lujambio Enters the Collectors' Court]*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24FGXc5GmCY>

private collection, etc. It is only after almost a decade of involvement with diverse communities and social groups that the Swiss artist, a major reference for Estol during the 2000s, manages to conceptually differentiate the precarious from the ephemeral. "The French word *précaire* indicates a socioeconomic insecurity that is not as evident in the English term precarious; indeed, *précarité* is used to describe the condition of a vast number of laborers in neoliberal capitalism for whom employment (let alone health care, insurance, or pension) is anything but guaranteed"¹⁸.

Interviewed by Hal Foster, Hirschhorn asks: "Is there a way to cross from our stable, secure and safe space in order to join the space of the precarious? Is it possible, by voluntarily crossing the border of this protected space, to establish new values, real values, the values of the precarious -uncertainty, instability, and self-authorization?"¹⁹. This question, which for a Bernese boy could be nothing more than a rhetorical exercise, resonates in a different way inside Estol's head, the South American *intello précaire* par excellence. A young artist who understands the historical necessity of having folk authorities, as well as understanding the difference between the precariousness of a petty-bourgeois life typical of underdeveloped capitalism and the borderline precariousness of migrant, undocumented, slave lives.

At a certain point, perhaps troubled by an auratic exhaustion or by this same awareness of the different political natures of the precarious, Estol seems to realize that the way to establish himself as a folk authority (his true and ultimate interest) cannot be an uncompromising surrender to the apparatus of contemporary art, which no longer recognizes them. His path and his public countenance are reformulated: he no longer appears as the troubadour capable of howling to gather a whole generation of cubs willing to violently make their way through the social landscape of art, as he did in *La mañana del mundo* [*The Morning of the World*²⁰], but adopts a lower profile, travels around the country holding art clinics, experiments with criticism and teaching, tries to major in Engineering, etc.; in other words, he stops cultivating his career as a contemporary of international projection. The artist thus becomes a sacrificial figure who puts his youth and his ideas at the service of the 2000s model but ends up reentering, partially desiccated, into the orbit of the folkloric norm during the first years of the 2010s²¹ (that is, he moves away from the market, distances himself from the incipient reconstitution of the museum landscape and distances himself from the authorizing spaces on which the Buenos Aires' scene rests).

¹⁸ Foster, Hal. (2015). *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*. Londres, Reino Unido: Verso Books. Traducción del autor.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ The first exhibition of Leopoldo Estol at Ruth Benzacar Gallery, held from March to May 2008.

²¹ By 2013, Estol shows only sporadically and mostly in independent, noncommercial spaces. He adopts the performative role of "canillita" [newsboy] (a folk figure exercising folk authority), promoting and selling his own art publication, *El Flasherito*, in the company of an editorial team composed of fellow artists Liv Schulman and Andrés Aizicovich. The publication remains active to this day.

Another transitional figure that could help us measure the effects of the mutation suffered by art after the 2000s, and that has not yet been reached by historiography, could be Belén Romero Gunset (Tucumán, 1983). Already as the daughter of a consolidated model, filtered by provincial artistic education and the particularities of a scene that is not the Buenos Aires one, she launches herself to produce under another horizon of expectations. Faced with the intuition that institutional and productive resources were concentrated in the country's capital city, she negotiated almost exclusively with a practice of low material demand, performance art, which until then had not been systematized by the artists of the early 2000s.

During the first years of the decade, performance belonged to the street. When it was not a way of inhabiting and scouring the public space to collect materials and political impressions, it was a temporary task force, tending towards the absurd, directed against the mandates of a sociourban order that had found a drastic limit and demanded reformulations after 2001²². Political collective performance, on the other hand, did not go through instances of profound transformation during the period; "committed art" took over the public space once more, but under norms and parameters defined at least twenty-five years earlier.

The novel conceptualization of the relationship between the artist's body and the city came from the idea of *flâneur*, a central axis of the discursive apparatus of Latin American neo-conceptualism in the 1990s but which ended up becoming a flawed trope in the mid 2000s. In postcrisis Buenos Aires, rather than a *flâneur*, the artist was a scavenger, a collector not only of garbage but also of bargains, trinkets and more abstract social impressions that could be capitalized and reconverted into artworks.

The figure of the *flâneur*, particularly from its dialectical fascination with the anonymous mass, was, in a strict sense, a product of the urban growth of the late nineteenth century. Taking up with a certain flexibility some of Kesselman's ideas, it could be affirmed that the Kirchnerismo of the 2000s turned the anonymous mass into a "mobilized society", so that a possible new avatar for the *flâneur* would be that of the affective witness to the movements of that mass, which no longer spreads along the boulevards but concentrates in the main square, in the courtyards of the government house, enters the city marching through the highways and invading with its otherness the sociourban fabric. Mariela Scafati is perhaps the artist who comes closest to this avatar: an anonymous wanderer, dazzled by the *erlebnisse* that the Kirchnerista political process managed to revitalize and rearticulate²³.

²² See Eduardo Navarro's early actions, particularly *Fabricantes Unidos* (2008).

²³ See Scafati's *Windows* (2011).

But technically speaking, the Buenos Aires flaneurism of the 2000s should be considered first and foremost a sensibility in retreat, organized around a dramatic process of transfiguration: that unknown figure, that hermetic subjectivity that was "away from home, and yet find [itself] everywhere at home", and that emerged as an exceptionality in the face of the indistinctness of the masses, is now not a person but the very remains of the modern city. The South American *flâneur*, therefore, not only has to take charge of their own solitude, but also faces the abandoned corpse of the modern city, a body that history has torn into hundreds of thousands of small appendages and relics, hidden in the intestine corridors of, among other meccas, Buenos Aires.

The place of exceptionality is no longer occupied by the *flâneur*, because it is now the cadaverous Buenos Aires the one that runs secretly, camouflaged, resisting the curse of progress like the ghost of a decapitated princess. In this sense, Bruno Dubner's photographic practice unfolds as a forensic science at the service of *flaneurism*. The mortuary dimension of Modern narratives embodied in urban architecture gains weight in his series *Las muertas* [*The Dead Ones*], a parade of funereal portraits of commercial signboards and hand-painted shop windows from the 50s, 60s and 70s: territorial expressions of an extinct modern bourgeoisie that were once part of the imprecise backdrop against which the *flâneur* wandered and today are little less than mystical hieroglyphs. If the metropolitan experience enabled the expansion of the *flâneur's* consciousness, today that consciousness, through works such as Dubner's, seems to focus on the study of coagulated memories.

The case of Romero Gunset does not end up being related to either of the two models, as she is neither a *flâneur* nor a scavenger; on the other hand, she contributed to the consolidation of bodily enunciations as the basis for a myriad of practices that only a few years later would become extremely popular in the art world -normalized practices, now conclusively far away from the street.

The early development of a rhetorical universe that included ideas and concepts such as "Pan duro" ["Stale Bread"] (her duo with Soledad Alastuey), "Energía abstracta" ["Abstract Energy"] and "Autodisciplina" ["Self-Discipline"] suggested an inclination towards a certain ascetic order, of poverty, rigor and inner knowledge, associated with the social and political climate of the postcrisis, but from a different hue to that proposed by the utopian-relational lexicon and already closer to that of activism. These notions were transferred almost immediately to performative works of resistance and concentration that marked the general direction of her work during the first years of her career, in gestures that would later filter even into the domain of painting²⁴.

²⁴ See, for example, the work of Sofía Bohtlingk in this same publication, analyzed by Ana Vogelfang, Florencia Qualina and Agustina Muñoz.

Her archetypal intervention *Roto* [*Broken*], in the 2011 Arteba-Petrobras award, found her seven hours a day, for seven days, destroying hundreds of objects of all kinds (books, household appliances, furniture) inside a room saturated with broken things and useless materials. Here, trash as ready-made, which just a few years before had been configured in sculptural-formal exercises by artists such as Estol, gets literally smashed, signaling the limits and exhaustion of "trashism". No one else, neither before nor after, was going to put so much trash in one room, because the time had finally come to think about other things. But beyond that symbolic closure around the aesthetic musings of the immediate past, *Roto's* critical fact was the systematization of the artist's presence and their bodily activity, an activity now circumscribed and fully integrated into the institutional panorama. In the same year, Romero Gunset suggestively carried out a street performance entitled *Cambiar* [*To Change*²⁵], which included a photograph of her nude body in the middle of the urban landscape and also functioned as a closure to the discussions on the artist's body and the city in terms of street-drifting and scavenging.

For Romero Gunset, the idea of precariousness is not reduced to the material: what makes existence precarious is everything that puts happiness at risk and prevents the potential development of the individual. The performative practice, in this sense, becomes for her a kind of meditation, a spiritual training aimed at strengthening her own agency and a tool that assures her control over the path of desire. Beyond sex-generic performativity²⁶, which would become a current concern for Argentine contemporary art during the following years under these same terms (individual desire), Romero Gunset's long-term actions aimed at provoking a more transversal type of movement, which gradually opened the way to new concerns: theory, on the one hand, and the body of others, on the other.

Método S1 [*S1 Method*] found her giving shape to, precisely, a method, or the possibility of thinking of an integral system that, from art, could offer solutions to the problem of precariousness as a threat against joy. This work, which in its public presentation included motivational sessions with an aggressive and almost military tone, ended up taking shape through a series of diagrams and graphic definitions about the nature of happiness and how to obtain it. "Joy is the experience of potency; potency is the capacity to affect and compose oneself", said the poster that announced the philosophical basis of her method.

Composing oneself through self-managing action has to do with a certain perception

²⁵ See <https://belenromerogunset.com/obras-2011-2009/cambiar/>

²⁶ For the relationship between precarity and sex-generic performativity see Butler, Judith (2009). Performativity, precarity and sexual politics. *AIBR, Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, Vol. 4 Number 3, pp 321-336. doi: 10.11156/aibr.040303.

of one's own consciousness as an illusion, because what we understand our consciousness to be is in reality a neuropsychic image shaped by precariousness, by external factors beyond our control. Thus, the method aspires to unearth one's own consciousness, to make recognizable the brief lapses in which this consciousness emerges and to work on them as if they were matter, to give them color and form. To this end, the artist creates a language of chromatic and geometric equivalences that make the foundations of the theory transmissible. In a Masotlean Pop transposition, she imports the language and techniques of ontological coaching, self-management and New Age to illuminate an apprehensible and computable methodology, which has as its starting point the Spinozian rationalism of affects. But instead of placing her faith in art as a vehicle for transformation, Romero Gunset refines her method and seems to move further and further away from art, seeking to occupy the role of folk authority with influence in more remote spheres.

This shift points to some attributes that could characterize the Buenos Aires art of the 2010s onwards, produced in a recessionary economic scenario, under a climate of withdrawal and isolation at a regional level and facing a reality that was completely different from the euphoria that defined the early years of contemporary art in Argentina. After a rupture with the big institutional houses, and after the gallery ceased to be viable as a work possibility for an increasing number of aspiring young artists, the return to the domestic space, to small-format works and to one's own body as a way of making art without paying for materials became more and more recurrent. Folk authority seems to be trying to regain ground as the only figure capable of mediating between a young, punished and disoriented art and the lost tradition. Thus, Pombo exercises his folk authority with full validity, because he is one of the few cases that can hold not only the title of artist of the 1990s but also that of artist of the 2000s and 2010s, and he can hold those titles even more justly than any young artist: thanks to his veneration for images, turned into a conceptual resource²⁷, new historiographic, visual and curatorial possibilities opened up for the following generations. On the other hand, an artist like Estol, distanced from objectual production, preserves his folk authority through art writing and pedagogy. Belén Romero Gunset, assisted by art to give meaning and formal support to a philosophical method, aspires to overcome the barriers of a limited social world (that of art) and expand the influence of her thought, as a spiritual folk authority, over more distant terrains.

If one of features of the art of the 2000s was the figure of the artist becoming crystalline and devoid of nuances, not only for the institutional fabric, but more specifically for the artists themselves, the art that has been appearing since 2013, orphan of the market and in search of a historical specificity that it still does not have, is

²⁷ Ver Qualina, Florencia (2017). *Subsuelos*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Adriana Hidalgo editora y Ponce de León, Alejo (2020). *Estrategias fatales*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: *Revista Arteba* #7.

characterized by an increasingly vague, or perhaps useless, experience of being an artist. If Argentine art as an idea and a story is to survive, we imagine that it will have to transform itself into a folk authority with the will and the weapons to celebrate a new council between image and time. Argentine art as a small angel, its wings peeled away as it tries to fly over the gusts of a fractalized, viral and virtual world, so as not to end up buried under the catastrophe of history.

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