

José Bechara

BY PAULO SERGIO DUARTE

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José Bechara's work was one of the first signs in Brazil that a certain market jamboree had reached its limits, it had manufactured its "great names" that could stay for longer. The jamboree was in the Reagan era, which here was combined with the peak moment of opening of political freedoms (the transition from dictatorship to democracy) and which was materialized in art with something with something very different: the sale of anything that was painting on canvas following a certain imported style, as always happens in operations determined by mercantile reasoning. There was celebration of the "end" of installations and reflexive art – confused here, in this country, with conceptual art – and praise of the "return of painting". But what painting returned? There is no record of any of the great painters have changed their medium. And a series of young artists started making paintings without taking part in the jamboree of what was know as the 80s generation. Of more than two hundred "painters" no more than a dozen worthy of the name remained. A quick filtering, not even needing old madam History to make a selection from the great illusion. Something so badly prepared, a spectacle that did not know how to distinguish itself from the field of the show business, could end no differently, despite the force of the market that constantly revitalized it.

Bechara's work appeared discretely in this context, contemporary painting that would understand the dilation of the pictorial field beyond the kitchen of the studio and the secrets of the pigment and brushes, choosing serious tones without strong chromatic contrasts. All against the tide of fashion. It laid no stake of the effusive eloquence of abundant figures and colours that had come to replace the old exoticism in a neo-parroting for success on the international market and, as a consequence, also here in a country dependent on foreign confirmation of its own values. He explored a process: in the place of pigments, the oxidation of steel wool on canvas. But not any thick fabric. He choose lorry tarpaulins, already well used, old: these are his "canvases".

The tempo of the surface was already given in the actual support, a history had been transported to the studio even before its transformation. We have a readymade in the canvas, like a skin worn by protecting cargoes along the highways, and the other tempo of the steel oxidation produced by the artist. The scars of patching are not hidden, parts of the work appear here and there like little events on the surface, booth in large monochromatic surfaces and in those organized by the geometry of the stripes. In addition to the pleasure that it

provides to so many who collect it, Bechara's very successful work indicated, at a precise moment, that another painting already exist long before the one he had shown collaborated in being retaken by a particular taste.

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