

Notes on the exhibition One steps further and it falls apart, by Ana Calzavara

by Tiago Mesquita

In the last two years, Ana Calzavara has developed a series of figurative paintings with opaque surfaces and subtle color contrasts. They are mainly tonal paintings that recreate indefinite spaces. Mostly the artist paints places. They are not exactly landscapes, nor domestic settings. Although there are ampler panoramas, open fields, paths, tracks and gardens, we always see the figures in the paintings in a partial, incomplete and undone way.

Even when Ana Calzavara depicts an area in Cidade Tiradentes that is neither rural nor urban, the field is hidden by the skeleton of a broken billboard. The artist stresses the opacity of its representation. Her views are obstructed. We see the places behind the plants, the landscapes bathed by such a bright light that we are unable to see ahead. The buildings, when seen up close, as in Escolha [Choice] (2017) and in other paintings on wood, become surfaces with no bulk or mass.

In Jardim [Garden] (2017), the place lurks behind an irregular, disordered scrubland that does not allow one to reach the empty and abandoned lot. When we look at the vegetation, we find a clear, illuminated patio, where everything seems to turn yellow. That half-abandoned, inconspicuous and messy place looks like the remains of a building that is about to be hidden by the trees the remains of a house, or a park, or a city that might have been. It reminds us thus of the remains of a domestic or urban life that is just about to bid us farewell, like a stubborn past that slowly loses its function.

In Ana Calzavara other gardens, this loss of meaning appears in the approaching of figure and foreground, by which the ground meets the sky. Everything is bathed by such a blinding light and such a deep darkness that the objects slowly lose their color. The green and yellow of the leaves, the brown of the soil, tree trunks and branches, as well as the rose, blue and black of some of the plants about to be swallowed by the color that dominates the canvas.

The images tend to a certain homogeneity. The objects and colors, as well as every distinctive trace, lose their force, and the canvas approaches monochromatism. The color that seems to encase everything is the color of forgetfulness. The artist is interested in this

twilight that levels all objects, as if she were registering their last breath. Perhaps therefore the artist appeals to the photograph as a tool and as a subject of intellectual investigation.

Ana Calzavara paints from photographs that she herself has taken, mostly. As others before her, the artist uses photography as a way to approach her subject an indirect way to register an instant that is gone for good. The series, developed between 2016 and 2017, get their titles from the vocabulary of photography. They are called Subexpostas [Underexposed], Superexpostas [Overexposed] and Negativos [Negatives], in a reference to their relation to light.

Still, the images are not photographic. The artist, as opposed for example to Gerhard Richter and Andy Warhol, does not look for harmony between contemporary art and other forms of image making. She seems to investigate photography as the register of a short brake, in which an object, a view, or the remains of the past are still able to reveal the permanence of things that are just about to dissipate. As the roads punctuated by headlights in the artists black paintings, the image suggests that something has happened there that does not happen anymore. The image is the memory of a fragile, abandoned place, that resists its own undoing, while Death awaits.

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[Translated by Joaquim Toledo Jr.]