

LAIDA LERTXUNDI  
INNER OUTER SPACE

C. Zumárraga 7,  
Entrada Maestro Iciar  
48006 Bilbao  
t: 94 679 22 92  
m. 645 005 426  
info@lataller.com  
www.lataller.com

L,

Years ago, before we were married, we were in Los Angeles at Skylight Books browsing the philosophy section together. I picked out a book at random. It was Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*. You said he was amazing, difficult but amazing. Taking up the challenge, and badly wanting to impress you, I bought the book and forced myself to read it cover to cover.

The main idea is that human perception is a composite of both something outside ourselves in the material world, and something inside, a blend of our memories and past experiences. Perception, then, is like the result of printmaking, with multiple screens layered to compose the final image. When I first read this it felt life-changing because it meant that, in some sense, I am constantly time-traveling, my memories projected onto whatever it is I'm perceiving at any moment. To gaze upon a mountain is to see that particular mountain, but also every other mountain I've seen, combined with abstract ideas of mountain-ness both real and imagined. When someone says "I think you're projecting" I want to answer "Yes, I can't help it."

If I stare at the living room wall long enough, what happens to my perception? I began having this thought at the height of the COVID lockdown, when it seemed like we were all spending a lot of time staring at the living room wall. At that time you were working on a film installation using multiple projectors. It was also during quarantine that we began letting Hanah (our daughter) watch cartoons, though we tried to limit it to shows we felt were wholesome and that had some artistic value. You showed her *David El Gnomo*, a Spanish cartoon from the 80s about gnomes who live in lush forests that somewhat resembled the landscapes of our new home here in the Basque Country, but that were out of reach in this new upside down and isolated world. You filmed your students in front of a blank wall, and projected images of the sea and stills from *David El Gnomo* onto their bodies. At the time, you talked about expressing a desire to be outside in nature, and the strangeness of returning to the land where you were born only to be kept waiting in the confines of our sublet apartment.

As much as your films have always deconstructed their own making, laying bare the cinematic device of illusion, I think *Inner Outer Space* is the closest you've come to narrativizing this process, to making it a kind of setting occupied by characters, in this case two women who seem to be either making up their mind about what film they are in, or whiling away the hours until film itself decides. It's as if these two are caught in a holding pattern, in the space between the projector and the screen. The opening scene creates the impression that the film has not yet quite arrived, first in that it depicts what seems to be a miniature model for some other fully-realized work being arranged and rearranged indefinitely, and second in that it is completely devoid of sound. We do not hear silence, which would come in the form of a room tone soundtrack, but are instead confronted by a vacuum-like absence. It's the visual equivalent of musicians in the orchestra warming up, that subtle cacophony just before the show begins. In a theater, this might cause some to wonder whether there might be something wrong with the speakers, as you'd begin to hear the sounds of the room, of people whispering and shuffling in their seats, maybe a cough or a sneeze. Then a title appears, followed by sound and these characters, the inhabitants of this zone of indeterminacy. They communicate to one another telepathically and dreamily browse a book of location snapshots which spring to life when touched before collapsing again back into the book's pages. This could be a place of boredom, of indecision, but also possibility.

I know you dislike it when people call your work "autobiographical" or "diaristic." I know it limits the work. It implies a less rigorous, feminized space of identification, of content over form (which is of course a false dichotomy). And honestly I find your work so mysterious and oblique that I'm surprised anyone would interpret it in that way. But having said that, I happen to share

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Taller y Galería de Grabado

C. Zumárraga 7.  
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m. 645 005 426  
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my life with you, and in doing so I've become aware of certain details which are difficult to entirely separate from the work.

In your new piece titled *Particular a Particular*, for example, there are fragments of correspondence from that salesman who, I recall, was a total pain in your ass. I'm forgetting all the details, but I remember he drove down in a van filled with old projectors and camera parts. He rambled, talking your ear off, speaking to you patronizingly as if you were a clueless child. He tried to gouge you on the agreed-upon price, sold you broken equipment and complained when you asked him to fix it, then screwed up your invoice multiple times. Basically he made a giant mess that you had to clean up, and on top of that you had to pay him! I wonder if he's not unlike those men who tend to bother you whenever you're filming in public spaces, who feel entitled to walk up and interrupt your work, and explain things to you about cameras or about cinema or about whatever else they feel you desperately ought to know right now in the middle of your film shoot. Your thoughts? *Particular a Particular* literally spells it out. But not without a little formal mischief. The words are pieced together using cutouts of embroidery patterns for baroque lettering, evoking both a christmas card from granny and a criminal's anonymous ransom note. It's a fuck you delivered in the quaint parlance of what a man like that might imagine to be "women's work." The sewing has even begun in places, with small tethers of blue and red thread stitched through the paper here and there. This gesture stirs a feeling that is so consistent with your films: the presence of your hand and an energized sensation that something is in progress, unfolding as we view it. It also acknowledges the subversive potential of those areas historically deemed unserious or frivolous by a macho male symbolic order: home crafts, diaries, fantasies, children's stories, female desire. I'm reminded of the work of Chris Kraus, who you tribute within the piece, as well as that of countless other subversive truth tellers: women artists and writers who've conjured that rippling, mutable space where critique, memoir, and intrepid formal experimentation are interwoven in such way that they cannot be so cleanly dissected or coldly analyzed.

A male journalist once asked Gertrude Stein to explain her incomprehensible work. She responded: "Look here, being intelligible is not what it seems. You mean by understanding that you can talk about in the way you have a habit of talking, putting it in other words. What I mean by understanding is enjoyment. If you enjoy it you understand it."

I've always enjoyed your work, so I guess in some sense I've always understood it. But this is the first time I've had to put it in other words. Normally, rather than try to describe your work, I tell people they should really just see it for themselves. But can't you say anything? Can't you describe it? There are some relevant words, like "feminist" or "non-narrative," but they don't quite capture the feeling. I guess I would say that your work is a constant interruption of sublime images, which somehow manages not to be frustrating or tedious, but extremely pleasurable and full of emotion. Rather than forcing our attention somewhere, your work slows down the act of looking so that we might begin to recognize it as a delicate and aesthetically beautiful process, one which takes place in both our present and our past, both inside and out.

Love,  
R

Text: Ren Ebel

Work made with: Maite Martinez de Arenaza, Ren Ebel, Marilu Perez, Helena Estrela, Mariana Sanchez Bueno, Unai Ruíz Amezttoy, Kai Ruíz Alonso, Martina Ruíz Alonso, Jessica Lee, Gabrielle Pulgar, Clara Rus, Christina C.Nguyen.

Thanks to: Hanah Lur Ebel Lertxundi, Begoña Prado, Tania Arriaga, Proiektors Eibar.