
ON GLASS

THE IDEA OF AN IMAGE

A project by Martín Vitaliti
in conversation with the work
of Joan Hernández Pijuan

Our first proposal for the *Sobre vidrio* cycle is the work of Martín Vitaliti (Buenos Aires, 1978), who presents a piece based on Joan Hernández Pijuan's *Gran espai d'aurat* (1976), through which he proposes new shifts in perspective and speculations around the enquiries of different tendencies in experimental painting since the 'seventies. Continuing on from those artist's explorations, the work of Martín Vitaliti excavates languages to subvert their specific characteristics and broaden their limits. Vitaliti's work for the Fundació Suñol, specifically conceived for the large window at the entrance to the space, began with Vitaliti's encounter with the original work at an exhibition on Joan Hernández Pijuan more than ten years ago at the Fundació. His intervention is woven with the threads of memory, and the reflections and fragments intrinsic to the act of remembering that particular conjunction. Yet this project also negotiates the fragility of memory, gaining weight and space in an architectural space that is also porous, a frontier; in an operation that ultimately impels us to question the visual regime, to agitate our own perceptual field and open it up to new meanings.

THE MEASURE OF TIME, THE COURSE OF PAINTING

Joan Hernández Pijuan (Barcelona, 1931 – 2005) is a prominent artist in the Suñol Soler Collection and was an important figure in the history of the Fundació Suñol. In the year 2010 the Fundació organised a monographic exhibition of the artist's work since the 'seventies, titled *La medida del tiempo, el transcurso de la pintura*. Martín Vitaliti, an artist who at that time was deconstructing and expanding the language of the comic, saw the exhibition and was particularly captivated by a series of paintings from the 'seventies, of which *Gran espai daurat* made the strongest impression. Hernández Pijuan in those years was making a series of sober, minimalist landscapes whose backgrounds were left completely bare to the gaze. On the surface of the canvas thick brushstrokes vibrate, repetitively placed in rigorous yet organic order. Hernández Pijuan was a methodical artist whose work was closely bound to nature and matter; but there is a constant starkness in his approach which also contains a certain mystical dimension. In *Gran espai daurat*, this dimension is linked to the symbolic usage of the colour gold in art history. Gold – a rare, precious material reserved for divine power and ultimately associated with eternity – has also been a symbol of light since our earliest history. And light plays a central part in the work of Hernández Pijuan: his paintings hold all of the hues and depth of colour, and run from opacity to transparency in a journey that might be considered another, impiously material, means towards revelation. Martín Vitaliti settles his attention on the transparency of the large window in the entrance to the Fundació Suñol, to investigate and amplify the margins of representation and the visual paradigm.

THE WINDOW-AS-PAINTING

So Vitaliti opens a window. He opens a window – literally, figuratively – on the work of Hernández Pijuan, through the painter's work, taking us to the edges of light. Hernández Pijuan had already intended this with his own oeuvre, and Vitaliti's project on glass carries the aspiration to its extreme. A window is opened onto painting, considered here as an exercise in calibrating the tension between opacity and transparency. Vitaliti's action is also loaded with historical meaning; it inverts the classical notion of painting as a window onto the world, in the Renaissance theory whereby the painting is a scopic device enclosing, framing and representing the world of the senses. This project transposes the terms so that the painting-as-window becomes a window-as-painting; and the visible world unfolds through the glass – a transparent, translucent (and invisible) material. Vitaliti's occupation of the invisible with a reproduction of *Gran espai daurat*, incorporating the

contingency of real light touching the surface, and adding to the proposal a reflection of a simulated, non-existent window, reminds us that art is (or should be) the place of the unseen, a potential escape from the logic of hypervisibility, an opening onto new spaces of possibility.

MOVING CURTAIN

The imaginary shadow of a fictional window is projected onto the strips of a curtain, whose structural function is that of an opaque screen that counters the window's transparency as though the strips were a kind of weave, like the canvas hidden by the brushstrokes on Hernández Pijuan's paintings. The curtain is ductile and flexible, and may swing or move slightly as it is blown by gusts of air. The window image is a simulacrum, but we only discover this after having observed it for some time; the shadow we see on the curtain is completely static, contradicting a shadow's intrinsically shifting nature. To encounter the mere possibility of movement reintroduces the condition of contingency to something that has been rendered unchanging. With this methodological shift, Martín Vitaliti once again challenges the practice and language of painting, and furthermore, confronts us with the evidence of a tremulous, floating existence that refuses to submit to our control.

WHERE TIME LEAKS IN

Gran espai daurat might be seen to enclose the monumentality of light, to seize it, to cast it into posterity. In this, the work would seem to differ little from the ancient masters; light is, after all, a metaphor of knowledge and a symbol of ultimate, immutable truth. Joan Hernández Pijuan's painting, as we have seen, calls up the silence of light, the bare, stark, hermetic, almost mystical qualities of the sacred tradition. Vitaliti's reproduction of the work situates it in a different context and divests the piece of its original verticality – its celestial reference; turning it horizontally to recall some of its earthly condition. The artist knows that the journey to eternity has come to its end. Light is bound to its own dark opposite, the shadow, and knows its own vulnerability. The strategy of the veil, which conceals in order to reveal, proves that the truth not only resides in light, but also in our blind spots, and in these, the notion of time slips away.

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