

Germination of the unobserved

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Nature can be perceived as an original, ideal, unpolluted place, but also as something inhospitable and dangerous. All atmospheric agents are therefore usually shunned, even though by taking refuge from them we are probably being deprived of real experiences. In effect, a number of landscapes still exist within us, but they exist as fictitious versions of an exterior universe and do not satisfy our need for what is natural, which becomes a mere echo of another existence in the world.

The work of Bob Verschueren reconsiders the relationship between art and nature, a bond that we frequently feel has been interrupted and sullied. A bond in which no importance is given to the natural elements themselves but to the representation of them. Through another channel, the Belgian artist establishes a personal dialogue with diverse areas of nature -especially the plant world- to create pieces of work that express a great fragility. But there is no drama, just regenerative creative strength.

This can be seen in his famous *Wind paintings* which, with surprising delicacy, used the strength of the wind to spread natural pigments such as crushed coal, chalk, iron oxide, *terra verte*, flour, different ochres and Cassel earth to colour barren areas. This extraordinary way to colour a landscape made him aware of the fact that an artist can make the preparations for a composition, but it is nature that creates and then breaks up the composition, which is fundamentally ephemeral.

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Therefore, each of his works of art must not be seen just as an object, but as an “experiential space”, the structure of another cosmos: a possible, fascinating, informant of a reality that usually goes unnoticed.

In this way, his dialogue with nature has taken diverse forms, fundamentally through poetical plant installations, in which we find ourselves face to face with the atmospheric agents of an undefined time, peacefully coexisting with their surroundings beyond simplistic nostalgic observation, sustainable recognition or late romanticisms, providing us with a myriad of interpretations that should not be reduced to just one.

Amongst the possible settings for his work, he attracts attention when he works indoors. This allows him “to separate the material he has picked out from its natural environment” –the artist admits–, reflecting on the same place in a more neutral context, different to that of the origin of the objects. In this case, he establishes an unprecedented dialogue with the city that plays host to his work - as he always uses materials he finds within the vicinity-, using vegetation found along the old riverbed of the river Turia, which he will work upon later. All this changes the space within the gallery, forming new orographies, landscapes that cover floors and walls, with all the essentiality he is capable of to wonder if some kind of harmony is still possible.

The result: seductive works of art interpreted as “nature translated to the exhibition space”, as the artist Anna Talens has also examined very closely in *The transformation of the experience of nature in art. Nomadism and the ephemeral*, with a special study of sculptures that perceive the material itself as artwork, without having to create a figure that really has little to do with it.

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In this study, the work of Bob Verschueren stands out as an example of “the staging of natural objects”, where painting as the principal medium used to present works of art with nature is secondary to direct contact with the geographical space. And this provides us with a different idea of a landscape: the “lived landscape”, the result of an experience of what is natural, and both the reason and purpose of creation. Earth and refuge join together to create a place that seems to refer to the birth of a distinguished field of meditation, where the weightlessness of some pieces seeks to draw our attention away from the rest.

Even so, as we observe we must not adopt an idyllic vision of nature, as this could also be harmful. Our relationship with nature, therefore, is not a refuge nor heavenly, but “natural” in all senses of the word; like “life” for Nietzsche, something that is loved and accepted for its positive aspects but also (and above all) for its negative aspects.

What remains is its prodigious expressive strength, the inestimable creative source recognised by John K. Grande in *Dialogues on art and nature*, who describes Bob Verschueren as an artist who presents a “reduplicative perceptive process”: taking elements of vegetation to an interior space is like seeing them in a different way. It is a second experience that goes beyond the original which, thanks to the decontextualization of the vegetation, gives it a prominence and meaning that has been unknown up until now.

We are surprised when faced with a certain *locus* dominated by the exceptional geometry of natural structures. Angles, hexagons, curves, fractals unfold before our eyes to pervade, pave, support and colonize the world, as Jorge Wagensberg shows us in *The rebellion of shapes* (together with Peter S. Stevens and D'Arcy

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Thompson) –as Bob Verschueren observes in his *Conversation with Robert Dumas*–, forming a series of constants to which our eyes have become accustomed and which our culture has used to create beautiful symbols.

In this exhibition, we can once again directly contemplate a leaf, a branch... to perhaps go back to our roots and, similarly, to a historical game of imitation between art and nature, from the interior of a delicate and unceasing construction process, a constant process of development: the promise of a new dawn.

And so the renovative power of germination reappears, accentuating the exceptional nature of each moment we live, in addition to a slight tension that becomes apparent when we come into contact with the exterior, creating the need to rethink the concept of a landscape and the possibilities of representing it artistically, always in comparison with the horizon of a familiar but undefined cartography.

It is, in short, one of those rare moments in which art becomes a true experience, something that only occurs when the observer notices some kind of change within, when he/she comes face to face with the work. This occurs when we are shown elements that should be familiar to us, but which up until now have gone unnoticed, generously providing us with a common space from which we can once again observe our surroundings.