

On mimesis and poiesis

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“... as appearance and not as a copy, works of art are images.”

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Keiseki: Traces, evidence, prints. A Japanese word formed by *kei*, scene and *seki*, stone. It derives from the term *Suiseki* that is used to talk about rocks and stones which due to their natural shape arrive to emulate in our mind landscapes, objects, animals..., images. These rocks are valued and even venerated since they are able to suggest forms that tend to mimic what exists in nature. The human being doesn't intervene in these representations and when he does he only does it to give that status. This representation is understood as an emergence of what once wasn't and from that moment "is", by subjective determination.

Juanli Carrión "finds" landscapes that have already been contaminated by human intervention. The artist chooses them to subsequently change them, recreating scenarios that remind us of images that are similar to something unreal, futuristic, like the shots of a science fiction film.

They are scenarios stranded in a sort of non-place, lost and seemingly foreign to civilization. However, according to the artist himself, they show "the erratic reality of human being". Traces, remains of an unfinished process that the artist takes up to make it artistic. *Kei*: scene that represents a colorist spectacle that is intended to reconsider the nature of the landscape found and with that, the nature of the spectacle itself. By giving the last twist to the mimetic game, the artist sees in these constructions that seem "real", a reference to *Suiseki*. The only difference is that this is a Land-Art intervention which rather than mediate in what is natural it acts on what was already artificial. The result, disturbing images that ironically refer to the deforming appropriationism the western view applies to eastern culture and which here extends to all intrusions of the exotic.

Carrión takes the stones found in that non-place from their status as uncanny elements and grants them artistic autonomy. Representing them, he creates them because he doesn't copy them; he only transforms them to make them different by converting them into the piece itself. Piece that is never a reproduction of something real but the anticipation of what didn't exist before, that explains his capacity to open up to a world of fiction that is self-sufficient. Because through representation what is created distances itself from its direct referents in reality, and in this way questions reality itself as an absolute and true category to turn it into multiple, into subjective.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, among many other ruptures and transformations, one of the most important movements in art history took place: the artist changes from being an inventor-artisan to become somebody that chooses, that selects a piece that is already made. The artist executes a gesture of an intrinsic transformative potential. It is necessary to remember the pioneering "action" of Duchamp in 1917, when he sent his celebrated urinal, *Fountain*, to the annual exhibition of the American Society of Independent Artists. An industrial object chosen by the artist and signed under the pseudonym R. Mutt. Marcel Duchamp referred to this action in the following way: "My *Fountain* was not a negation: I simply tried to create a new idea for an object that everybody thought they knew. Anything can become something else, that was what I wanted to show".¹

¹ "My *Fountain* was not a negation: I simply tried to create a new idea for an object that everybody thought they knew. Anything can become something else, that was what I wanted to show", Marcel Duchamp speaking to Ulf Linde (1961), quoted in Harald Szeeman, ed., Marcel Duchamp, Basel and Ostfildern-Ruit: Museum Jean Tinguely Basel and Hatje Cantz, 2002, p. 90.

Carrión's stones, which are industrial remains of an unsuccessful engineering, witness the progress and are examples of abandonment, become support and object of a new reality, the artistic, and they seem to quote Gadamer when he says "to recognize that the sense of mimesis only consists of making something be there".²

In the artist's choice a shift to fiction is in process, provoking that, from this moment on, all is negotiated within the artwork itself. It is here when Carrión uses an ironic strategy that primary seems to leave out the question of mimesis to concentrate on the direct appropriation of references that sink their roots in the contemporary popular culture of excess. However, this is only an apparent oblivion, the tug of battle with the continuous reality through a new duplication: the use of the ironic resource. The settings pictured are filled with smoke, with impossible colored lights that relocate the images in a kitsch aesthetic, as happens in some photographs taken by Carrión or in the video *Kei-Seki* (2010), in which an abandoned concrete tunnel turns into the entrance of a gloomy disco whose main feature is the absence of human presence. They are pieces that gravitate between the gibe of the imaginary of mass culture and something alien, uncanny in the Freudian sense of the term, like something that was once familiar to us (*heimlich*), but at the same time is strange (*unheimlich*).³ Some kind of unfamiliar feeling takes place when we contemplate these images that combine known but unconnected elements and which lack what we expected to find: the human being.

Perhaps, the irony lies in the incongruous superposition of elements taken from different fields like *Suiseki* culture, engineering or kitsch aesthetic, multiple and diverse "realities" that account for the impossibility of talking about a unique reality, and consequently, the impossibility of reproducing it. All is relativized, even the transcendence of the artwork itself, in a twist that goes from the sublime to the ridiculous, by questioning the reality as an absolute status and evidencing the traps of representation. Everything becomes appearance, apparition, an emergence of something that since it didn't exist previously, is therefore not a copy.

The project continues with the *Kigata-ishi*, sculptures made of concrete that, again, emerge from this tension between natural and artificial. They are cactus that grow in the portrayed landscape, or they are rather a representation made of cement; because mimesis, since Aristoteles, is not only an imitation of the real, but also an artifice, an elaboration by the poet of the real. They are sculptures that accurately reproduce the cactus despite the artificiality of the material. When he moves them to the exhibition space and turns them into an installation, Carrión adds elements that are intended to emphasize their non-naturalness, like the blue neon lights or the smoke that surrounds the pieces and invades the room. Such excess, such overload of adornments, seems to plagiarize an absurd idea of something spectacular subtended by mass culture. Through this, the artist returns to the ironic resource and makes fun of the traditional understanding of art as imitation of nature. The *Kigata-ishi* follow a circle of appropriations, comings and goings between reality and its representation, between natural and artificial, a setting made of mirrors in which everything seems to be what it's not.

Carrión separates his work from reality, and by reversing the rules of representation he establishes a game of appearances and confusions that end up placing art inside an ontological reality that highlights the ability of any language to go beyond itself.

² Gadamer, H-G. *Poetry and Mimesis in Aesthetics and Hermeneutics*, Madrid, 1998. p. 126.

³ Freud, S. *The Uncanny* (1919) in *Complete Works*. New Library. Madrid, 1996.