

LIGHT MARKET WAITING

A conversation between Jesús Palomino y Javier González de Durana

Javier González de Durana: *How do you see yourself with respect to artists of your own generation? Who do you feel you have most in common with and who do you feel more distant from? And for what reasons?*

Jesús Palomino: The clearest bond I can establish between the other artist and I am acquainted with and myself is friendship, irrespective of whether our ideas about art coincide or not. Of course, I can feel a closer proximity to or have a deeper friendship with some artists of my generation than with others, but basically what interests me is to recognize those artists who I know belong to what we could call the “artistic community”, both here in Spain and abroad. I should also say that the idea of belonging to any particular generation is not an important issue in my mind. Of course, I was born at a certain moment in history and I have received a specific kind of training. But this has not created an intellectual circle or group to take part in, at least that is my impression. I could give you a few names of people I feel a close proximity to: Helga de Alvear, the owner of the gallery where I show my work, with whom I share very similar criteria about professional ethics, Armando Montesinos, Mitsuo Miura, Alberto Peral, Txuspo Poyo, Rafa Suárez, François Winberg, James Beckett... As you can see, some of these people are not artists in the strict sense of the word, but work in the art world and this is what unites us: we share a common public space which each of us tries to fill with meaning, in our own personal manner.

JGD: *Is there any artist who you feel close to in the theoretical aspects of art, let us on a conceptual plan, but very distant to in their material creations? Is it possible, in any case, for this apparent contradiction to happen?*

JP: The contradiction you refer to between a sense of affinity at a conceptual level and a certain distance in their material creations can happen quite easily. In fact, this is true in the majority of cases, I can feel very close from an intellectual viewpoint and very distant with respect to our material creations. Take the case of Armando Montesinos for example. He is one of those persons with whom I feel a strong intellectual bond and he never introduces himself as an artist in public. Armando writes about art, he thinks critically about artistic creation and is one of the most highly qualified people when it comes to talking about artistic processes and their practice. Another person with whom I maintain a high level of dialogue is the Dutch artist Ansunya Blom, although there is no clear relationship between her work and mine.

JGD: *What situation, what image or what kind of circumstance marked the starting point for these fragile constructions?*

JP: With regard to how I began my life as an artist, I can tell you that the first art from which I concentrated on and which totally captivated me was painting. Even today, painting seems to me a very interesting activity and really demanding. I stopped painting very early on because I felt I would never be capable of producing work to match my level of interest in certain subjects. I simply stopped painting!!! After this, my personal interests were more clearly defined. I began doing interventions in rundown and abandoned public buildings and spaces. Afterwards, I did a group of

sculptures and drawings that led me into the “domestic space”. The space and the idea of a home, how we think of a home, how we relate to the domestic environment. These pieces kept me occupied for about five or six years, more or less from 1993 to 1998. In September 1997, I presented a series of sculptures which I called “GROUND WORKS” at the Helga de Alvear Gallery in Madrid. This title alluded to the functions or relationships that were important for me within the home and the desirable capacity of the home to sustain us, with its qualities and uses, with relation to one’s personal and social reality. The tone of these sculptures were evocative, intimate, desirous proposals. This is how I defined the invisible structure of the home based on its qualities for human use.

JGD: *Described briefly how you reached that moment in your artistic career. What academic training did you receive at the beginning, what kind of work did you start doing, and where did you go form there?*

JP: I began making these fragile constructions in 1998. I closed a chapter in my career in which I was doing sculptures and, faced with the need to find a new way of responding to my development as an artist, I hit upon the idea of constructing an enclosed space, a room in which I would show a domestic scene. The clearest characteristic of this space was its dilapidated appearance, a domestic scene affected by extreme conditions of necessity. These homes, constructions or scenes, did not emerge from any previous image in my head or from any previous reference. Let’s say they arose like an “emergency” in the double sense of an immediate necessity and of unexpected secretion. One of the new characteristics of these pieces was the possibility for the spectator to visit them, touch them, wander around them, etc. The “recognition” effect was quite clear among spectators as they could easily relate these constructions to “poor spaces”, with slums, with marginalized spaces. But of course, that reference (rundown slum), so easily accepted, read by spectators, was nevertheless a work of imagination or, in other words, a fictional story, a fantasy about deprivation or poverty. Nothing to do with a real slum or marginalized inhabited space. Perhaps those houses had more to do with the possibility of telling a number of stories, attitudes, activities, a certain awareness of the human condition that against the background of a deprived scenario might be more easily narrated, more clearly demonstrated. These activities would involve attitudes of resistance, the struggle for personal spaces in society, with humour and survival... I believe that the affections and perceptions that these houses may have awakened suited my interests very well.

JGD: *Your work is evocative and gives the spectator a lot of room to finish “imagining it”, it contains narrative possibilities but is very open to a free interpretation or almost any narration, at least that is what it seems to me, if indeed that is what you are looking for and the lack of definition is real. Do you want the spectator to feel a little disoriented when he looks at one of your constructions?*

JP: Disoriented? I would say “displaced” rather than “disoriented”. The clear and subtle information generated by the type of construction that I present, form part of what I am interested in. Perhaps a break in the coordinates of information and perception in the spectator might be used to open a new space in his system of consciousness. Well, I believe that the effect of the most genuine imagination works like that. When I talk about the spectator I include myself, because I am the first spectator of my work. If we analyse the scenes and their construction a little, we are aware that they have nothing to

do with real slums, they are imaginary constructions that attempt to narrate vital attitudes in situation of need. I have never taken inspiration from “real slums” directly, For me, the accumulation of the imaginative information presented by these constructions (fictitious house, imaginary inhabitant, low and personal building technology) seeks a realist effect; constructed imaginations, narrations installed in the space of the gallery, the museum or directly on the streets. By creating this kind of scene, I am not trying to make myself the “spokesman for the marginalized and the poor” or the inhabitants of the slums in my city, that is not the “realism” to which I refer; I seek, rather, to create an effect of “reality” which allows us to learn, understand, recognize certain attitudes of the human condition. Perception plays a leading role in this process of understanding and reading. An extensive and lively perception that might be extracted from the experience of visiting the installation, recognition, encounters and places for discourse, talking architectures, etc. Finally, I have even felt that the places which I configure and build may be simple places for dialogue, reflection or questioning, perplexing places from which to articulate thoughts in a “place-another”.

JGD: *Your materials are poor, but your constructions are finished in a manner in which might be described as exquisite, and in some places acquire a luxurious appearance; on the other hand, some materials are perfectly folded, ordered and clean; your construction makes express reference to the “street market”, with the vibrant colours typical of an exotic location, but bereft of any negative connotations of the Third World (or, at least, any of those we can imagine): dirt, disorder, chaotic, recycling... Why?*

JP: Regarding the materials and construction technique, I suppose that when you call them “poor”, you refer to the fact that the technology used is not sophisticated, I suppose that with the use of a very basic technology (one might say that there is even a sense of “ridiculing” technology), I try to place the person and his/her condition at the centre of all social reality. Yes, I would like to be said that my constructions are: materially poor, exquisite human. Making all the constructions by hand and by leaving clear evidence of their manual creation, only highlights the markedly human nature of the precarious construction, a construction which, not having obtained a space in order to exist, still resists. For me, detecting these creative processes that offer a way forwards in the mist of many adversities, is miraculous. Perhaps this perception leads me to conclude that the human condition can emerge, shine even when faced by the most adverse conditions. This might be interpreted as “political romanticism”. Even so, I will say that history is full of examples of cruelty that destroy any possibility of human ethics. Don’t you think so? I rather propose a fascinating look at the human capacity to create and recreate genuinely positive realities in favour of the possibilities of individual and social life.

JGD: *Why is the dramatic situation that we assume exists between the “users or residents” under such conditions shown so clearly?*

JP: Why so evident? In order to convert these constructions into a imaginative celebration; to convert “ordinary objects” of an “ordinary reality” into events that celebrate the fascinating aspects of life; to liberate us from the discomfort that economic difficulties provoke in us; to accentuate what is desirable positive under real conditions; to convert these constructions into devices that impel us towards different, progressive spaces, towards more liberty.

JGD: *Market suggests encounters, exchange, the open air, a souk, an agora, a meeting place, but also buying and selling, taking advantage of the needs of others, making a living, potential abuses, money-making, excessive accumulation of money, etc. Light means something that has no weight, that not last a long time, etc., but is also banal, inconsistent, etc. Waiting, for what to happen? If a market is a place of action, where one seeks what one needs, what else can one expect?*

JP: When I coined the title, I was thinking in English and Spanish at the same time. LIGHT MARKET WAITING allowed me to use the double meaning in English of the word light: light as in sunlight and light as in the opposite of heavy. Thus, the title suggested a place - of human discourse and the exchange of goods – which is luminous and, at the same time, precarious, where everyone expects that their trading activities will help to sustain them and bring prosperity for all. With this title my intention was to create a situation with a dual effect; firstly, a slightly intriguing and captivating title which, on the other hand, enables one to create new relationships and feelings, if it is analysed in detail. Finally, I could say that the construction process which has kept me busy since 1998 could be defined as nothing short of a “trial”. Trial and error: discover, conclude, invent, improvise during the very process of creation. Sometimes, the final result of the work does not match the project as a whole, simply because what dictates the result is the instantaneous materialisation of its installation and its perception. In other words, 20.000 decisions per second while I am working. Or, to say it another way, with these constructions create a living, lively, vibrant space to relate the human adventure.