

**Blind paintings**  
**RUBÉN M. RIERA**  
**30.09.16 – 12.11.16**

Blind paintings or the place of the gaze  
The secrets of the image and the silence of art in the work of Rubén M. Riera

When we look back to the objects belonging to the north American Minimalism movement – with the added plus of a *historicity* that always gives, paradoxically, the *pedestal* that these objects reject –, we tend to forget that these flat shapes with no narrative whatsoever, *industrial* by gesture and vocation, were created largely to extend a bridge between painting and sculpture. Or to be more scrupulous in this clarification: that the message that these objects wanted to convey was to annul the distinction between both classical subjects, nevertheless without rejecting, quite on the contrary, a certain and included visual and interpretative voluptuous ambiguity. Clearly, its ultimate goal was always to end illusionism (“that European relic”, in the words of Donald Judd), that would be blamed for demanding from the art object a reality already built beforehand. Or better: that you would owe to an a priori system and to a reality already given and expressed. Well now, there certainly wasn’t amongst the great *minimal* artists the defence that they would have of their artistic and aesthetic interests in the same rigor or the same quorum. Another great artist, writer and theorist of this movement, Robert Morris (in my opinion the most brilliant theorist of them all), ended up writing more or less the same defence as Judd, but in a much more sophisticated and European way (and more fun too), because he denied the different features of the art of the old continent at the same time that, *unintentionally wanting*, he would also state and defend them. In one of his texts he writes: “When I sliced into the plywood with my Skilsaw, I could hear, beneath the ear-damaging whine, a stark and refreshing “no” reverberate off the four walls: no to transcendence and spiritual values, heroic scale, anguished decisions, historicizing narrative, valuable artifact, intelligent structure, interesting visual experience.” (1) Now we can grasp, in this pulling away from European relics, “but not too much”, why years after writing these sentences, Morris made the wonderful sculptures of the folded felt as if they were fallen robes of the saints of Zurbarán. And it is precisely here, in that singular phenomenology of perception and what I think was a necessary minimalist prologue, where we start the commentary and the analysis of the work of Rubén M. Riera exhibit in this gallery.

The works that the artist has decided to show in the space of the gallery and that has the binding title of *Blind Paintings*, are structures that deny in equal measure painting as much of sculpture, at the same time that, ferociously, defend and express them. As a matter of fact they are *phenomenological* structures, very involved in the effort of describing matter of factly the human way of “being in the world”, based in the partial nature of visual experience. Partiality focused in the “perceptive” limits of human perception, to the point that these works remind us the limits and measures that both Leonardo da Vinci (with the *Vitruvian Man*) as Le Corbusier (with the *Modulor*), left marked in both the beginning and end moments of Modernity. They are sculptures *painted* within the limits of the body of the artist. In these objects we observe a morphology of movement, or an optical rotation with interferences of radial effects, as if we were witnessing a unrenounceable desire of gifting the visual object, or the canvas as a closed universe within itself, of a vibration where the same reference to visibility as a science even as a “*cosa industrial*” [industrial thing], also has a chromatic and naked sensuality where the “effects” can be read also as “affections”, and with that the possibility of glimpsing other visual flares, or complex and hard to interpret light interferences, or indications of a naked narrative (but not emptied) of its syntactical armour to become, solely visual language, the neutral language gifted with a syntax that structures and puts order to nothing but that harmonizes all in an universe of pure chromatic and optical referentiality. In the work of Rubén M. Riera, the visual and the tactile are fluctuations of a non-existing centre, but essentially it is a continuous and dilated transformation of a pendular movement, and that has as a vertebral axis the vibration of light, always and when this gesture itself that vibrates also stimulates the speculative fantasy, the alteration of signs, and the affectionate and sentimental modulation before what’s being observed. Expressed in a diverse way but with the same meaning: in the work of this artist a contemplation of parts and fragments of Art History is presented, that the author considers appropriate to replace them in a specific aesthetic manifestation and with the highlight of exceeding this same quality through other media, with other voices and varied references in time and space. Without forgetting the music, that we can’t hear, but that is present, as a very important trigger, or “*agent provocateur*”, of that *painted* vibration in a rare and seductive pentagram.

Surely, it would be easier, or less complicated, to place these works (sculpture/painting/object/installation) in one of the many strategies that the artifice of art made needed, in the 1960s and around the post-duchampian object driven contemplations known to the time, to think or dignify itself, less as “art thing” and more as structure of language and thought. If he had opted for this critical and theoretical alternative no mistake of appreciation would be made, because logically there is in this work a lot of “cunning language”, but in truth I think and believe that his work is no more (no less!) than a double and magnificent demonstration of painting and sculpture, very *classical* in thought and fiercely contemporary in its making. Every self-respecting “structuralist”, for sure, can “analyse”, “scientifically” all we want and more; all perversely “perceptive” that our very own gaze can take, we can count on it. All that I have cited can be found, in more or less measure and presence, in this “black hole of appearances” but it starts from a quality and *classic* consideration of the art object, and this quality brings us closer to an exquisitely perverse consideration in the understanding of artistic creation.

There is in *Blind Paintings* a sophisticated baroque quality of the ellipses, or a veiled elasticity characteristic of anamorphoses, in the strenuous interlacing of lines and vectors, paths and territories, parallel and diagonal, straight and curved, that present themselves in the scenic space of the art object as a explosion point, brutal and irreducible to any syntactic or morphologic order. In the same way that an empty sound is present that takes us back to the same debility of human limits. Gilles Deleuze, in one of his most beautiful works, *Logic of Sense*, writes: "It is the weakness of our nature that gives the painting perspective, as the art of the builders of illusions and all those artificial interventions, their magical power" (2). Maybe due to this "debility", these works let us predict with a radiant clarity that there is something within them unsettling panoptic, with a semiologic overflow (let's remember "no but yes" by Robert Morris) that alters the efficacy of signs. In other words: what is at stake in these works is the idea that its final form is less important than believing that this painting and sculpture together certify the triumph of a new fragment, of a new portion of objective reality, configured with the same passion and thoroughness of the most brutal and objective of realities. Maybe we are talking about a *Blind Figuration...*, or of a home and of the night, like the beautiful verses of one of the best Portuguese poets of the 20th Century, Sophia de Mello Breyner:

*The night gathers the house and its silence  
From the structure from the foundation  
To the still flower  
You can only hear the ticking of the time clock*

*The night gathers the house to its destiny*

*Now nothing is dispersed is divided  
All is like the watchful cypress*

*Emptiness walks in its living spaces*

Luis Francisco Pérez, Madrid, Summer 2016

- (1) Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press 1993.  
(2) Gilles Deleuze, *Lógica del sentido*, Paidós, Barcelona 1989