

LLUÍS HORTALÀ

Opening: September 13th, 2018

Until October 20th, 2018

A verbatim trompe- l'oeil ('trick the eye'). *Encore un moment, monsieur le bourreau, encore un moment* ('One moment more, executioner, one little moment') is an oddly devoted exhibition to trick the eye. The three great structures made of wood and the little rectangle of modeling clay, which lead the production, are marked by a lavish pretense game.

Lluís Hortalà (Olot (Spain), 1959) attended in 2014 and 2015 the renowned Van der Kelen Logelain's school in order to learn about the techniques which Alfred Van der Kelen established for decorative painting at the end of the 19th century. There, he prepared for imitating the texture of marble that he now uses in a set of falsely protruding objects. His purpose is to draw the spectator's gaze and to deep it into a heartbreaking scheme of slips and tensions, with which he attempts to put into practice a sort of archeology of scopic regime from the same physical affectation of the eye. The trompe- l'oeil is what enables Hortalà to set a reflection upon art and visibility as physical experience, through displaying a group of objects that achieve to trick the eye over and over again, even though the conscience of whom looks at it believes to have found the trick.

Jean Baudrillard referred to the trompe- l'oeil as *more false than false*, 'a simulacrum fully aware of play and artifice'¹. The trompe- l'oeil catches the eye, intercedes with its ability to constitute a place and undoes the sovereign status which the gaze usually has.

Opposite the trompe- l'oeil, the gaze cannot rule and impose a vanishing point from which decrypting the space, but that caught eye is what is going to establish such vanishing point of the gaze, which in turn, the objects cast. Opposite this trompe- l'oeil, there is nothing to see; it is the eye that discovers itself as the bearer of another gaze. It is not a *hyperreality* either, but, just as Hortalà says, the trompe- l'oeil is not more real than real, it is simply the real'². In the trompe- l'oeil, it is the same trick of visibility articulated in all its literalism.

The museum as guillotine. At the end of the 18th century, there was a critical change in the conception of art. In fact, E.H. Gombrich refers to such idea when he calls upon the transformation at that moment between the idea of an art that has to be noble, and the idea which then emerged of *an art that has to be honest*³. The technique of trompe- l'oeil is used by Hortalà to intervene violently upon this founding moment of art, art history, and the scopic regime which appeared with modernity.

The crossover between the old noble art and the new honest art came about with the Enlightenment and the Romanticism, though to bring such pause, it was also needed the emergence of a technology, so innovating at the time as it was the museum. Indeed, the Louvre, opened on August 10, 1793 along the first anniversary of the French Republic, was the first device which enabled the existence of art without any other condition, and hence, enabling it to find its own law, its autonomy, from which it could develop in such an honest and real way, as part of nature⁴.

1 Baudrillard, J. (2011): *Seduction*. Madrid: Cátedra.

2 Private talk with the artist. Barcelone, June 21, 2018.

3 Gombrich, E.H. (2013). *Ce que l'image nous dit*. p.196. Barcelone: Elba.

4 'A work of art is going to be asked, from the second half of the 18th century, authenticity, and in order to get it, it was required to achieve autodefinition. Then, its existence will only depend on its own laws, although these are annoying, offensive or unacceptable for the society of its time.' O. Rofes: *Art públic i producció de localitat*. Doctoral thesis submitted in 2015, unpublished.

Hortalà finds the aseptic *white cube* of F2 Galería as heir of that fiction, when he covers one of the sides of the place with the 1:1 size model with the base of another museum, the National Gallery, which was opened shortly afterwards in 1824, in London. Quite eloquently, the artist names this work, *Guillotina (Guillotine)*, echoing, then, the correlation, set by Tony Bennett, among the implementation of the guillotine and the creation of the museum, in his *The Birth of the Museum* (1995).

The guillotine was the tool which eased the establishment of a *same kind of death for all*, regardless any distinction of rank or social class. The smart and democratic trimming, which was established with such tool, reduced the showiness that along the Old Regime the torments used to have, since though the time has turned it into an icon of the French Revolution, the guillotine made easier that punishment and death could be withdrawn from the public sphere. In this way, the guillotine and the museum imposed nearly at the same time all around the Europe of the 19th century. Therefore, with both of them, an old way of subjugation, based upon producing fear like was the public punishment, could be both removed from the sight of people and replaced it by the chance that the museum offered of intervening on the population's taste. Thus, admiring the art is that people could recognize themselves as a fraternity, and could empathize then with the willingly belonging to the same State that—at least in its visible side—was not going to subdue them through coercion⁵.

The two chimneys, on which the exhibition focuses, provide, indeed, a detailed account of how the crossover from a noble art to an honest one required the assistance of both the museum and the guillotine. With his former exhibition, *Il y a bien du monde aujourd'hui à Versailles* ('There is a lot of people here at Versailles'), (Rocío Santacruz, 2016), Hortalà had already started to embody Marie Antoinette and Madame du Barry's vanity with two chimneys of the palace of Versailles. In F2 Galería, they are displayed, again, facing each other, reduplicating then the rivalry that these courtesans had throughout their lives.

On one side, we find Du Barry's chimney which owns an offensive, Borbon and voluptuous taste, rococo in all its splendor. This comes from the Salon des Jeux, where that plebeian, gruesomely promoted to countess, used to lodge and reach the royal bedroom through a stair built to satisfy such purpose. There, she fulfilled the sexual perversions of a lewd, lured, and fully submitted to her will, Louis XV.

Right opposite, it is Marie Antoinette's chimney, the Austrian she-wolf, the *rococo queen*, also known as *Madame Deficit* due to her crazy waste of money, with which she put into debt the palace coffers along her reign⁶. The chimney comes from the Cabinet de billard, which the queen ordered to be built in her private rooms, and that shows a sophistication where we could feel the Neoclassicism style, which on the one hand joined the revolutionary flame of the Third Estate, but on the other one, the Versailles courtesans also adopted it as trendy.

With his solo exhibition in RocíoSantaCruz (2016), Hortalà rephrased the palace quarrel which confronted Marie Antoinette and Madame du Barry in the early decade of 1770, and that showed *de jure* power of the princess and of the *de facto* mistress of Louis XV. The tragicomedy, a cock fight in Versailles but with wide implications on the European policy, ended up with the Du Barry's victory. This took Hortalà to carry out the pertinent chimney with a size blatantly bigger than the one of the humiliated, Marie Antoinette.

Nevertheless, in 2018, we find in F2 Galería another chapter of the same story: Marie Antoinette and Madame du Barry are, here, personified with the same size, matched opposite the base of the museum, the guillotine that ended up with their time— as well as the guillotine which, truly, was the last curse that both head suffered a few months after the Louvre museum opened. Be they *the rocaille style* of Louis XV or the *style à la grecque* of Louis XVI, the deliriums of the last decades of the French aristocracy harmonized then in the same way. Hence,

5 Tony Bennett develops the ideas which Michael Foucault had already prompted in his book *Discipline and Punish. The birth of a prison* (1975) about the establishment of the guillotine along the French Reign of Terror in relation to the development of the modern prison system. Bennett recognizes that his work is based upon the analysis of the museum apparatus following purely a Foucaultian key, and then, the museum is an institution which the philosopher did not develop in his archeology of power.

6 S. Zweig (2012): *Marie Antoinette*. Barcelona: Acantilado.

those chimneys are no longer noble opposite the base of the museum, and those indoor triumph arches, symbols of the courtesan vanity, are now acknowledged up to the spectator's perspective, establishing themselves as the frame of an absent piece of art.

At the other side of the room, it is *Edicto*, Hortalà's last prank in this crossfire. It is a small rectangle made of modeling clay on the same wall of the gallery and shares with the other works, the same condition of trick the eye, but in this case, an inverse trompe-l'oeil. Therefore, it is the only work in the exhibition which has relief in order to fake a graceful device that is between a revolutionary pamphlet and the superficiality with which modern art foreshadowed the end of art.

Towards a cold rococo (anachronism and institutional materiality). Hortalà places himself in a remote time–Versailles– and operates according to a material strategy–the trompe-l'oeil–. Thus, he establishes a powerful anachronism with which he achieves to interfere the present, and particularly, the discursive regime with which the contemporary art develops.

Versailles is increasingly ever-present here: *Encore un moment, Monsieur bourreau, encore un moment* were the last words that Madame du Barry pronounced in an attempt to enlarge fruitlessly her life, when she was already in the scaffold. Her request has also been read as a wish of the society theatre that the *Ancien Regime* was so as to perpetuate in time. Indeed, that 'hundred windowed marble and stone box of Versailles, with its bows, curtsies and cabals and with its full-dress parades, that 'eternal minuet of the same figures', where 'every movement was controlled' and where it is lived 'exclusively to play', didn't fully die at the edge of the guillotine. Hortalà's hypothesis is that it was transferred to the museum, and that, although be it on behalf of an alleged democratic honesty, it has permeated the whole art system until present.

The old technique of trompe-l'oeil is used by Hortalà as a means to cross towards both sides of the mirror, and to keep both worlds under pressure. The contradiction consists in, though 'those pieces are about the false, they do not stop being authentic at the same time', as Javier Peñafiel let know to Hortalà in a talk which both artists held . Indeed, those trompe-l'oeil deselect themselves from their noble predecessors as they do not hide beneath their surface, poor materials or a society in crisis, instead the only thing locked is a long learning time, a careful manual and continuous work, as well as a thoughtful reflection on visuality and the art itself. Nevertheless, when Hortalà, through *Edicto*, absorbs Malevich's pure superficiality with a trick the eye, Peñafiel's assertion turns immediately reversible, and it might also be read in the opposite way: *these works are about honesty, and at the same time they are the artifice that art has always been*.

The institutional criticism, which Hortalà develops, has the peculiarity of being founded upon anachronism. His work is based on an assault on art and on the museum carried out *from behind*, facing both with an epistemology that was immediately previous to their emergence. Also, another aspect of the rococo world that has left imbued along Hortalà's criticism is that the ability of intervention of art doesn't narrow here to the discursive field. The material agency of the piece is a learning which Hortalà gets from that sumptuous period. Hence, whatever the sense each spectator is going to give now to these group of works, what is really sure is that the watermark of such trompe-l'oeil is going to challenge their eyes.

Oriol Fontdevila