

BETWEEN THE ERASED

(what the mirrors would covet for themselves).

no 'here,' you realized, without the wind-ballast of some posited 'there'

without the warranty of some richly invested naught

"... drew us, thanks to its veil, all the closer." (Benjamin on *aura*)

as you, living already in the resonance of an absentee's, made these deposits in the very midst of so much erasure

Gustaf Sobin

Alain Corbin dedicates the first chapter of his "History of Silence" to the intimacy of places. He hastens to tell us that, in that sense and without any doubt, the house will be between such privileged place. "Amongst those places where silence prevails, we read, the house distinguished by its living rooms, halls, bedrooms and all those things that make up its decoration"¹. Home interiors are a space for listening to silence. A silence and a void that one must seek in an anonymity that gives each specific house that condition of being particularly ours, that of someone, a paradoxical way of owing the home, in its abstract sense, by virtue of each of them being different, each being the house of each person. A diversity that constitutes, in an abstract overlapping of all houses, the ideal home as a concept. So, we say, "being at home", without an article being used, because home is and isn't something specific, it is and isn't private, given that it costs us nothing to shelter in another's house, nor take it as a loan, and given that one can also say that our home is carried with us. The idea of the house, by adding the infinite houses of each person, activates an erasure and later deactivation of details – just as with Newton's disk, composed of the seven colours of the rainbow which become, when turned, a white circle.

The empty house is the space to which Natalia Escudero returns. A house practically deprived of its furniture and furnishings. A house in the process of ceasing to be. The house of her grandparents, in Calle Lapuyade in Zaragoza, which was waiting to be sold: a complicated mission in the middle of the Crisis. At that time, the artist lived between her hometown and Kassel, taking advantage of the situation in order to have her own workshop. The house to which she returned was an empty house, but we would be fooling ourselves to think that it became anonymous. Absolute white does not exist. Newton's disk never spins fast enough. In "Species of Spaces", Georges Perec offers an inventory of actions, of verbs in the infinitive, that are applied to eviction from the home: fall, tear to pieces, unnailed, unscrew, unhook, disconnect, loosen, cut, dismount, fold "². After the death of Natalia Escudero's grandfather in 2011, these actions had been applied to that house. But, like any eviction, this one was also

¹Parmi ces lieux où s'impose le silence, distinguished maison, ses salles, ses corridors, ses chambres et toutes les choses qui en constituent le décor". Alain Corbin. "Histoire du silence". Flammarion. 2018. Pg. 12.

imperfect and there was a lot of residues. From the start, after each one of those verbs listed by Perec, there is a kind of trace: a fence of dust, traces of glue, plaster that bulges, the nail remaining without a mission or the frayed cable. Some of the furniture remains in the grandparents' house, packed up, perhaps a victim of absent-mindedness. They wouldn't interest anyone that much. The curtains have been left in their place, still allowing a pretend dialogue with the outside. But there are also objects of uncertain value that nobody wanted to take or dared to throw away.

Natalia Escudero occupied that house thinking about finding a place to work... and found a place to work on. Specific work on a place, recording the memory of a space, has become a frequent and fertile strategy among artists, especially among contemporary artists (in the feminine). See, for example, the case of Rachel Whiteread, with her famous castings or moulds of spaces or objects, the affectionate research on real estate in Madrid conducted by Patricia Esquivias, or the "pulled out" building walls that are about to disappear that Patricia Gómez and María Jesús González practice. In these cases, the place is saved from time, archiving its form or the details of its surface, delegating direct observation in a procedure and reserving a deferred experience for a future observer or visitor. In the approach of Natalia Escudero, although there is, to a certain degree, a sense of register, exhaustivity is not required, and the experiment is not delayed or delegated over time, but is considered to be the creative process itself. She qualifies it as learning, an exercise in attention. "It's about," she tells me, "learning to be attentive through observation of the 'past' or of a place slowed down in becoming".

That is not just any house for this artist. It was the house of her grandparents. A large house where a large family lived. Her grandfather was the last to leave it. Grandma Nati died much earlier, two years before Natalia was born. So she couldn't have known her. But she tells me that she dreamed of her as a child. And that she gave her a comforting message in that dream. Because of the precise description she gave of the apparition, the elderly family members confirmed that this was indeed her grandmother. Natalia tells me about this in the most natural way. Without sentimentality. And nor does it interfere in the work that she has done on that family home. What is relevant is to think of this artist as an alert sensibility, a girl who went to bed with amulets (as she confesses) in order to remember dreams. This infantile practice seems to me a curious anticipation of the role that objects will adopt in her current work.

The intention of the artist, to occupy the house as a workshop, was to paint. The final work to which the experience led her is not far from painting; despite all appearances, it is a derivative of it. Something like a painting on the threshold or in its preliminaries. The fact that it is a house so linked to her biography is what makes this project -which will be entitled "White" - a more abstract exercise, differentiating it from works such as those of Patricia Esquivias. The attention to minimal events, of what inhabits the uninhabited house, playing with the title of Jardiel Poncela, is configured as the object to be produced, something that, being immaterial, gives us a weak but consistent materialization, through strategies of register, appropriation, sacrifice and restored visibility. Artistic activity is considered within a cycle that will produce some things (works) by others, giving rise to a new transformation, without closure. One of the few

²Translation by Jesús Camarero. Montesinos. Madrid, 2007. Pg. 62.

ways in which reality survives is metamorphosed. Memory cannot remain as it is. It must be transformed, losing part of its condition, sacrificing something of itself along the way. Some for example, like Rilke, will say that things are being purified thanks to Art, losing visibility and gaining invisibility. As if that invisibility or erasure was a sublimation. The poet said something along the lines of artists and poets being bees of the visible, saving the invisible for the hive. Something touched on in a shocking way by Maurice Blanchot: "Man is bound to things, he is in the midst of them, and if he retires to his realizing and representative activity, if he apparently withdraws into himself, it is not to license everything that he is not, the humble and obsolete realities, but rather to drag them along, to make them participate in that internalization where they lose their value of use, their distorted nature and where they also lose their narrow limits to penetrate into true depth"³. However, Natalia Escudero manages these processes of armed metamorphosis at the same time as sharp poetic sensibility and considerable discipline inherited from, let's say, the cold strategies of Minimalist Art or Conceptualism, from which she draws. For example, that internalization also results, at the time of presentation, a second externalization. A setting in the hands or in the eyes of others. It could also be said that the realities on which she works, such as this house in the eviction process, do not cease to be in themselves, albeit unconsciously, artistic interventions, "found" interventions - or at least, it can be said that in the house they are produced poetic phenomena, where the process of erasure or invisibility has begun spontaneously, and whose elaboration has involved abandonment and chance, agents which are good to recognise. As the verses of Gustaf Sobin say, one works in the heart of the erased, living in the echo of a defector subject.

It is pertinent to go into details. When talking about register as a strategy, it is important that we focus on the videos created by Natalia Escudero. The camera acts here as the phonendoscope of a doctor, with a similar mixture of care and coldness, stopping at specific times in different parts of the house. Two complementary projections are presented which, at a given moment, coincide in showing the same image, some curtains that are suddenly animated by a current of air. A first projection allows familiarization with the rooms, as in a preliminary and slow journey. The second one approaches the walls, the corners or the floors, choosing particular fragments, and delays them even more, until barely perceptible. The smallest begins to take on value, for example, minimum action that supposes the variations of light or the effects of the house's microclimate. In some fixed planes, it takes some time, on the viewer's part, to begin to see the shapes hidden by the white of the wall. Only attention reveals them. In other cases, the camera moves with extreme slowness, discovering little by little some minimum signs. One of the important details is the disappearance of the paintings and mirrors from the walls. Only their footprints remain. Chus Tudelilla, in a wonderful text published in "El Periódico de Aragón" (29/04/2018), dedicated to analyzing the work of this artist, addresses this matter: "There are no pictures in the uninhabited house of the dead grandparents. Only walls. Empty. A void that demands the presence of something. However, it happens that it is only possible to summon the loss by citing the idea of emptiness in order to overcome the horror that accompanies it".

³Maurice Blanchot. "The literary space". Translation by Vicky Palant and Jorge Jinkis. Paidós. Barcelona, 2018. Pg. 130.

Photographs of the house also appear within the pages of an artist's book where we find some codes. They are the vectors that serve to represent colours in graphic arts, the so-called CMYK code. Each digit refers to the proportion of a colour: cyan, magenta, yellow or black. The hypothetical absolute white would be represented as (0,0,0,0). Impossible to find in reality. This book is a catalogue of targets, but only encoded - converted into instructions. Such as (0,0,6,0). All of them equally hypothetical. This strange census of whites that are not, dirty whites, and of photographs of spaces deficiently empty, can be associated with the well-known experience to which John Cage attested in 1951, when he locked himself in the anechoic chamber of Harvard University. It is thought that perfect silence was achieved there, but the composer was able to appreciate two sounds, one minor and one major, which according to what was reported, corresponded to his nervous and circulatory systems. In a later writing, "Indeterminacy", Cage tells of this experience and determines that silence does not exist. He also says that "there is neither empty space nor empty time. There's always something to see; there's always something to hear"⁴.

The survival of objects depends on our attention. Questions encourage it and the answers can bury them. Therefore, Natalia Escudero leaves certain letters (literally) unopened which her relatives are supposed to resolve at her request, doubts about the most enigmatic objects found in the house. It is not a matter of masochism. I think the important thing was to fire the memory of those objects in those consulted. The same happens when objects appear exposed to the public. As suggested, it's like puzzles. This proposal is evident in the "tables" sculptural installations that this artist is repeating. On these "tables", she tends to place things in a precarious balance. She presents, for example, a desk where glass has replaced the board. However, the drawer that could have been spied thanks to such a substitution has disappeared. On the crossbar where it rested, two cups and two plates have been left, which seem to be in danger on such a narrow base. On the glass, amongst other objects, a roll of white paper, damaged and deteriorated (let's say written on or painted on) by light. And something that takes on a special and curious importance within the project of Natalia Escudero: some sachets, the size of business cards, such as those used in the past to express condolences at wakes, all with a black border, a sign of being in mourning. The artist found a box full of these envelopes. Avoiding its funereal meaning, when playing with them, when opening them, these envelopes become houses, in the genuine and childish model of the house, with its gable roof.

I also alluded to sacrifice as a strategy. It sacrifices, as we have seen, curiosity and objects are physically sacrificed. One of the star pieces of her "White" project exemplifies this question. It is an installation composed of books, dozens of books, which have been guillotined, and thus unified in size, having successive parallelepipeds or bricks of paper on a shelf, without solution of continuity between them, appreciating only the differences of colour of the papers, or the chance of the edge of the guillotine falling in the middle of a line or a blank space. As Nerea Ubieta says: these books "blinded by their argument, no longer offer words to read, but a

⁴"There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear". John Cage. "Silence". Wesleyan University Press. Middletown, 1978. Pg. 8.

different visual code, conceptualizations of a lost and recovered place"⁵. However, on the mantelpiece, some sheets from these ill-fated books are shown, some fragments that someone at the time was concerned with typing. In a certain way, the operation carried out is cruel, but less cruel than the indifference with which libraries, in similar eviction situations, end up in the waste. The intervention reiterates the need for a metamorphosis, a reordering and reconfiguration. This piece can be related to another project by Natalia Escudero, developed in Kassel in September 2017. "Vanishing office". It was about an action carried out between four in the afternoon and midnight. During those hours, 3,000 books from a legal library were available to participants, so they could read and rewrite them. Then, they would be digitized and disappear in their strict materiality. This farewell ceremony gives all those arid German *Tomazos* a transient aura. In that trance of disappearance, the quality of the text on paper intuitively feels something different from its future digital quality. Natalia Escudero, if we look closely, does not play, like some artists, at ignoring technological reality. Her millennial consciousness raises the problem of the artistic object (and memory), no longer in the Benjaminian era of mechanical reproduction, but in its digital age; the era of the entity in dissolution. The Rilkean trip of visibility to invisibility, left in the hands of machines, seems a parody. But the artist can remain attentive, on the threshold, with a rescue mission. The practice of Art, as subtle as Natalia Escudero can understand it, attends to these quiet messages of things, giving them a second chance.

Alejandro J. Ratia

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⁵Individual exhibition sheet from Natalia Escudero in the gallery "A del Arte" from Zaragoza.