

OUTLINED TERRITORIES

By Adriana Lauria.

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When we look at Laura Murlender's paintings the first impression we have is of a solid and assertive materiality which is perceived as determining a boundary. Boundary that by its sole existence poses a challenge: that of putting to test our abilities to go beyond it.

The idea of constructing boundaries in order to "cross" them seems to be the motive that the artist has found to symbolize the contradictions profiled from the very beginning of her artistic work. Her training at the Academy of Jerusalem, commenced towards the end of the 70's, submerges her in the current debate of that time, that is, conceptual tendencies versus a return to pictorial paradigms. Since then she has been searching for a common ground in which the tactile quality of paint and the dramatic expressiveness of color can cohabit together with a disciplined rectilinear network that structures the composition on the plane.

During that period she takes up photography and its practice reveals ways of "focusing" the problem. She cuts out fragments of reality that teach her methods to circumscribe images. The facades of factory buildings with their brick architecture and divided window panes or piled up wooden boards, taken from one of the far ends of their rammer, suggest from thereon the motives that she will explore in her paintings: the perpendicular weavings and their struggle to maintain an order that is permanently besieged by the accidents of matter.

The images meditated at length by Murlender, provide her not only with forms and colors to be explored but also with a synthesis of contents that she develops in her work. The oils worked in overlapping layers and enriched by the addition of other elements –marble dust, sand, paper, cardboards, gain in emotional expressiveness with the traces left by the work process (like footprints of the artist). The textures, obtained by obsessive and insistent irregular thickenings or by successive applications and scrapings, seem to allude to a dimension of existence and underline its contingent aspects. As in our memory, these features appear stratified, blurred and distinguishable in a fragmented way and, again, as in our memory; the passage of time is perceptible.

However, a structure of perpendicular strokes, revealing the presence of what has been rationally conceived that other dimension of the human element, subjugated by the capacities of the spirit. But this contest, which represents the place characteristic of what is human, which is none other than the crossroads between the world of ideas and that of substances, never yields the same results. Sometimes matter seems to take the upper hand and cover the structure and in others

the latter breaks through the thickness, having to resort, on occasions, to a rewriting in order to become visible.

The reticule itself appears altered, with open strokes that are irregular or not entirely orthogonal. The photograph of the pile of wooden boards had already shown the author the way in which an order based on the aligning of equal modules can be disrupted or unstructured as a result of handling or due to the contraction and dilatations that affect materials. These “slight” disruptions of a given order suggest the way of constructing images that are capable of connoting the hesitations of thought.

The presence of diagonal lines in some of the paintings remit to a certain sketching of spatiality that insinuates itself as a residue of perspective just as the emphasis placed on some other line proposes a horizon. The titles given to the paintings also direct our vision and associate the images with specific meanings, making it inevitable to think of a landscape, particularly an urban one.

An urban painting such as *Blues* deserves a particular analysis, because in it, the artist reveals part of her creative process. Unlike the other paintings, here we can see outlined areas of pure color such as the reds that come forward to the foreground or the touches of blue that make the surface vibrate, as well as the quick, broken brushstrokes in black that define the ordaining grid. In the background we see the different tones of gray, white and ocher that relate this piece with the rest of her production and give us a hint as to the author’s decision to interrupt her usual method which would have consisted in continuing to apply successive layers of paint. This particular outcome becomes a sort of personal citation. It brings to memory the work of Piet Mondrian, one of the creators of the abstract vanguard of 20th century art.

Murlender’s “humanized constructivism” seems to inscribe itself in the “rioplatense” tradition (N. of T.: expression used to define anything common to both Argentina and Uruguay), initiated by the constructive universalism of Torres Garcia. We find a close correlation, especially with the abstract works painted by the Uruguayan master during the 40’s, inspired by the interlocking system of the stones in Incan architecture. In a likewise manner, the work we are addressing uses the basic system of a grid composition, is inclined towards synthesis and non-figuration, a chromatic reduction (grays, ocher, earth colors), and explores the symbolic dimension of these resources, putting them at the service of an artistic metaphor.

Just as Torres Garcia did in his time, the artist is seeking, with the series she is presenting today; to manifest an identity that covers all registers, from the affective and emotional levels to the political and cultural ones. Hence, the title *Territories*, chosen for this exhibition and the invitation to explore them.

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