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BOGOTÁ / COLOMBIA

Catalina Mejía

Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá -MAMBO-

Desastres del corazón was the title of Catalina Mejía's show at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá late last year. This show presented an introspective, essentially autobiographical vision, in the artist's own words, where drawing, painting and installation explore the emotions and oscillations of the heart. Like a cardiogram, Mejía's works are situated in space to make visible a series of elements that speak of the deepest feelings, belonging in this case not only to the artist's private world but to all who experience her art.

Mejía's drawings and paintings become veritable love letters, containing words such as *rosas y espinas*, *usted*, *wish*, *trust*, etc. These letters with no recognizable addressee are like the messages launched by a lonely castaway hoping for a response in his or her remote isolation; unanswered calls that amplify the disconsolations of love. These elements, among others, seem to flow from Mejía's work and make it impossible for us to remain indifferent to topics that have been explored for centuries by literature and art. Who doesn't feel destabilized by these issues? Who hasn't found himself or herself immersed in such disasters of the heart, shipwrecked by them? Questions all that arise, among others, as we are confronted with Mejía's art.

Philosophers, writers, and artists through the ages have interrogated love as a notion

and a feeling, and this is the terrain on which Mejía's work is grounded. Frustrated loves, impossible loves, longed-for loves, loves lost: such are the drivers of an artist whose work constantly uses crossed-out or practically erased words, as if love were indeed required to always scrap what came before and start from scratch. A kind of journal overflowing the space of a private notebook to install itself on the wall. Here, words become the visual and conceptual support of the work of art.

It bears noting that Mejía used a conceptually similar device when she was nominated for the 5th version of the Luis Caballero Awards in 2009: in her "libraries", words and books fused with painting to create new images, with the book titles emphasizing feelings and states of the soul. Something similar occurs here, in *Desastres del corazón*: words emerge forcefully only to disappear behind erasures and scratches, just as love, as the artist seems to insist with this visual device, is an eternal process of erasing and starting anew.

With an element of humor and irony, this show also includes a materialization of impossible love through a series of phone books arranged on a shelf, a work titled *Looking for You*. The search for love is unending, and this work leaves a phone call in suspense. The long list of names, organized alphabetically, suggests that love awaits in those pages; if it seems absurd to think that ideal love can be found there, in truth the absurdity is that of love itself.

Another interesting work is a night table covered in books whose titles speak of long, unending nights when reading fills the gap left by love. Here, loneliness is the protagonist, and books are all we have for company.

Each work in this show contains a story. They seem private and intimate, yet they are at the same time true mirrors on which we see ourselves reflected. These mirrors allow us to see—as was the case with Mejía's *Bibliotecas* series—fragments of our own selves. The conceptual strength of Catalina Mejía's art resides here, in this mirror effect, as she reminds us that no other organ is as exposed as the heart to the oscillations of the soul.

Speaking of such matters of the heart and of romantic feelings today, when everything is determined by utilitarian relationships, may seem uninteresting. However, *Desastres del corazón* calls us to look closely at what remains of romantic love. In truth, the work of Catalina Mejía speaks to us of a great tragedy and a great loss, when the traces, the residues, the pieces and fragments of what had seemed so solid configure a cartography and an X-Ray of what is most intimate to human beings.

In this exhibition, Mejía presents us not only with a virtuoso performance, but also with her ability to confront such a complex theme, one that artists have approached in many different ways. There are traces of romanticism in her work, but not the kind of romanticism that would engage in an apologia of sublime love, but the kind that clearly tells us how impossibly complicated romantic love is.

Ricardo Arcos Palma

Catalina Mejía. *You You You You*, 2010. Pencil on paper. 14 ¾ x 22 in. (38 x 56 cm.).



Marco Maggi

NC-Arte

"...in art, there is nothing more tragic than being in a rush." Marco Maggi

NC-Arte presented in Bogotá the solo exhibition, *Optimismo Radical*, a Marco Maggi Project. With his deep study of space and its relationship to time, with his exaltation of the simple and the everyday—and at the same time, detailed and delicate—and with his fascination for that which is not *seen* but *remains there*, Maggi invites us to follow a path that not only reformulates the limits and dimensions of draftsmanship, but opens up new conceptual spaces that promote the de-acceleration of the day to day in order to contemplate a world beyond the light-weight, saturated visions of the contemporary age.

Optimismo radical, installations adapted on-site and a series of single works opens on the ground floor at NC-Arte with a 10-meter tall column covered with more or less 12,000 yellow post-it notes. Facing this work—from which the show takes its title—on the floor is *Incubadora*: a serpentine model of 500 reams of white paper, where the hues of the surfaces fluctuate between primary colors and white. On the wall opposite to the column is *Cascada 1*, an installation that at first glance appears as a group of white envelopes, organized with precision. Following the path suggested by the labyrinth, the reams of paper climb the stairs of the gallery and reach the second floor, where the mountains of paper end on a bridge, *Escalera sobre Puente*, down from the crevices of which 10 white envelopes fall down vertically and remain suspended in the air, *Cascada 2*. Also on the second floor is a series of single objects that function on their own but belong together in a same conceptual poetics. Some examples are *Turner Box, 35 mm, Google Plexi*, and the *Hom-enaje a Mondrian*, a painting that alludes to the exemplary figure of Neoplasticism and where, if we look in the reverse, we can find a print of Mondrian's own *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*. It is important to note that, although Maggi is not married to any single theory or history of art, the principles of Neoplasticism—such as the use of primary colors and pure shapes such as the square—do resonate in his work. As for Mondrian, the use of primary colors and geometric bodies is for Maggi a way of retaining the essence of the work of art; these are forms that all of us can relate to. This show, with works that are unique in their different formal aspects, ends in the same conceptual hiatus, referred to the need to generate spaces for the training of perception towards subtlety, and to approach time more slowly.

As viewers contemplate the works in *Optimismo Radical*, new depths are revealed by the weight of the insignificant. The labyrinthine rhythm of *Incubadora* not only invites us to slow down our pace, but identifies delicate figures on the surface of the paper reams. Similarly, *Cascada 1* reveals different ranges of color behind the finely cut figurines. In *Incubadora* and *Cascada 1*, are the relief figures small architectural models, or perhaps a story? It is irrelevant; the framework and the content do not matter, what matters is what is communicated by the totality: to slow down, to observe, to think.

It also bears noting the air of ready made that permeates several of Maggi's work. The artist uses the most simple and mundane ele-



Marco Maggi. *Incubator (color co)*, 2011. Cuts on 250.000 office sheets and color cards. Variable dimensions.

ments and loads them with meaning through his design of space, through the paradox that arises as the result of his delicate interventions on the material (which is, to a degree, industrial), and, like the pioneer of the readymade, Marcel Duchamp, play with words in his title, generating ambiguous interpretations. The clearest example of the importance of Maggi's titles is in the column at the entrance, *Optimismo radical*. What are post-it notes but the scraps of paper on which we jot our to-dos, marginalia, and important thoughts? The size of this column is not the only thing that can take our breath away; above all, it is the idea that in the course of our lives we accumulate so much stuff, and have so many pending matters, that it is often difficult to confront existence with a measure of optimism. Maggi suggests we be radical and fearless in our optimism. Through the use of such simple materials as these pieces of yellow paper, Maggi doesn't only implement the materials that are the signifier, but gives his work, by means of its title, a signified—a meaning.

In *Optimismo Radical*, Maggi invites us to revisit the ontology of drawing—and of art in general—and its possibilities for exploration. As a result of its constrained historicity, drawing is seldom able (or even attempts) to go beyond the margins of the sheet of paper. It is precisely the need to free drawing from its past, from its canonical restrictions, that Maggi presents a new proposal. The artist is able to challenge the bi-dimensionality of drawing with his scalpel and his handling of light and shadows. His ambition for detail is in the end a juxtaposition of the imperceptible—the most *micro*—and the general, the all-encompassing—the most *macro*. Maggi's intensity is not intended only

to act on a formal level; his language on paper is ultimately a path leading into a conversation with a concept. As he reminds us, "I propose a visual field that wants to multiply our sympathy for the insignificant."

Vanessa Adatto

Johanna Calle

Casas Riegner Gallery

For several years now, Johanna Calle has been making drawings using letters instead of points and lines, thus conjoining writing and draftsmanship. With these drawings, as Catalina Casas accurately noted, "Johanna Calle draws as she writes. She draws as she rebuilds. With thread, bolts, wire, needles, and cables she wades into literature, architecture, and music. And in the end all is skillfully mixed and connected to become poetry. Only not the kind that is read, but the kind that is seen."¹ As well as an infinite patience and great skill, Calle's delicate drawings, subjected to painstaking exactitude, denote a process of reflection focused on language and on social issues, and an interest in pointing out some of the contemporary world's difficult problems still pending a solution.

"The use of language," the artist says, "has been recursive in my work. I have made drawing that reflects about language, letters, and signs. Not only the letters of the alphabet in themselves, but names whose semantics evoke eloquent titles, and also transcribed texts whose content and terminology emphasizes aspects of the issue at hand. In my drawings, I deal with linguistic