

Salvador Victoria

Concentration

1985

oil on board

198 x 144.7 cm

Inv. no. P00274



Concentration (1985), the painting by **Salvador Victoria** Marz (Rubielos de Mora, Teruel, 1928-Alcalá de Henares, Madrid, 1994) is constructed through the use of the circle, an abiding ineffable and symbolic figure in his practice since the late-fifties. With a certain informalist air about it, though unchecked and extraterritorial, almost from the very beginning he eschewed the beaten path of *art autre* or *abstraction lyrique*. Victoria, an early practitioner of abstraction in Spanish art, always defended an active and resonant Bachelardian space, the construction of a painterly setting governed by a quasi-crystalline purity of style, a driving quest and the distinction of someone who has deliberately chosen the sidelines.

As has been underscored on previous occasions, when describing Victoria's works in a select show at the Arthur Tooth gallery in London in 1962, the critic and artist Keith Sutton incisively pointed out, precisely the distinction of the artist's painting, the differentiated aspect with regards the rest of the sextet, its less "racial character", while also endorsing what Pierre Schneider had said about the trans-continental aspect of his painting when coming across the artist's work at the 30th Venice Biennale in 1960, at which he would show his work again in two other critical events for the art of the time: 1968 and 1972, as well as at the São Paulo Biennial in 1967.

Victoria always occupied a personal and distinctive position with regards the art of the time, connecting with new creative movements. In the mid-sixties, with informalism already in decline, this artist dovetailed neatly with the coolness of the prevailing moods of the time and his essentially ordered practice would also fit in to perfection with the new normative airs that appeared towards the end of the decade. This air of distinction was seen to be, at one and the same time, as contemporary as it was anchored in a vision of art whose roots were firmly planted in Klee, the painter from Berne, and took form in terms that Lucio Muñoz would call "energy", "inner reason" and "spirituality", a description that the artist himself would endorse, citing Klee, in a true declaration of principles, and Victoria's own credo when engaging with the ineffable act of creation: "l'art ne reproduit pas le visible: il rend visible. Et le domaine graphique, par sa nature même, pousse à bon droit aisément à l'abstraction." Art does not reproduce the visible, rather it

makes it visible. To a certain extent, Victoria was not only defending the supernatural component that subtends creation, but was also aligning himself with the importance of calligraphy in the composition of his works. Or, at the artist himself put it in 1958, “my painting can be placed within expressionist abstraction, leaning towards matter and signs (...) with a grounding in colour, which is what gives the painting its true plastic meaning (...) a deeper and more diaphanous expressive clarity (...) balance.”

To some degree, the architecture of his painting would suggest a certain equivalence to a kind of historical avant-garde of an ordered lineage, artists whose exploration of painterly forms was crucial: I am thinking, for instance, of painters like Vantongerloo, Mondrian and Van Doesburg, who showed us what one might call the maximum tension of expression, which is to say, the recognition of the structure of the painting that does not discard its poetic and imaginary dimension, while at once bestowing it with significant power in its way of understanding abstraction. Victoria's *Concentration* also forces us to recall Kandinsky and his take on the spiritual in art, his vindication of the cosmic as an undertaking to be carried out by the artist, something that was made clear in the painter's strange alliance with the regulation according to which, even more so than the revealed form beneath the painting magma, what is truly essential is to undertake the metaphorical transmutation of what is painted and a rendezvous with another dimension of space which is essentially poetic and spiritual, something to which he would remain steadfastly loyal throughout his practice in different representations of forms.

In 1965, for his first exhibition at the Ateneo de Madrid, he would explain his painting almost as an aporia: “I do not know my painting. My wish is for it to be anonymous and for it not to transcend the picture, for it to remain in desire and that this desire, through an inner force, would reach the maximum emotion.” In Victoria's paintings of circles in a quasi-mystic, spiritual state, one cannot separate form and colour, which the painter understands akin to Ben Nicholson, which is to say, not so much as a mere physical vibration but as an expression of the intimate soul of the idea.

Concentration speaks of this uncompromising defence of a world held in suspension: an artist who holds up uncertainty as the silent declaration of contemporary art, so accustomed to the conceited categoricalness of the real world. A hymn to the energy of suspended circular forms, at times on the verge of the nothingness of white-on-white, at times incandescent, perhaps auroral, emphatic and suspended, or dreamlike blues in the case at hand, like a luminous cosmos, a composed storm of circles that conjure an ineffable mystery. Rehearsing a mission to touch a kind of eternal light, one might venture to say that, in suspended time and reaching a luminous certainty in a state of aesthetic nirvana, this painting formulates a luminescent space, an exhilarating extension of an unknown light. A powerful figure with a forthright presence, at times categorical and other times held in suspension: the circle, on occasion pushing its way through the lines of the space, beyond the forms from which it seems to emerge, might well be the symbol-figure of his life as a painter.

ALFONSO DE LA TORRE

Jorge Oteiza

Metaphysical Box by Conjunction of Two Trihedrons. Homage to Leonardo/ Utsgoikoa

1965-1974

Construction of black-painted steel plates on stone plinth

30.5 x 28 x 26.5 cm

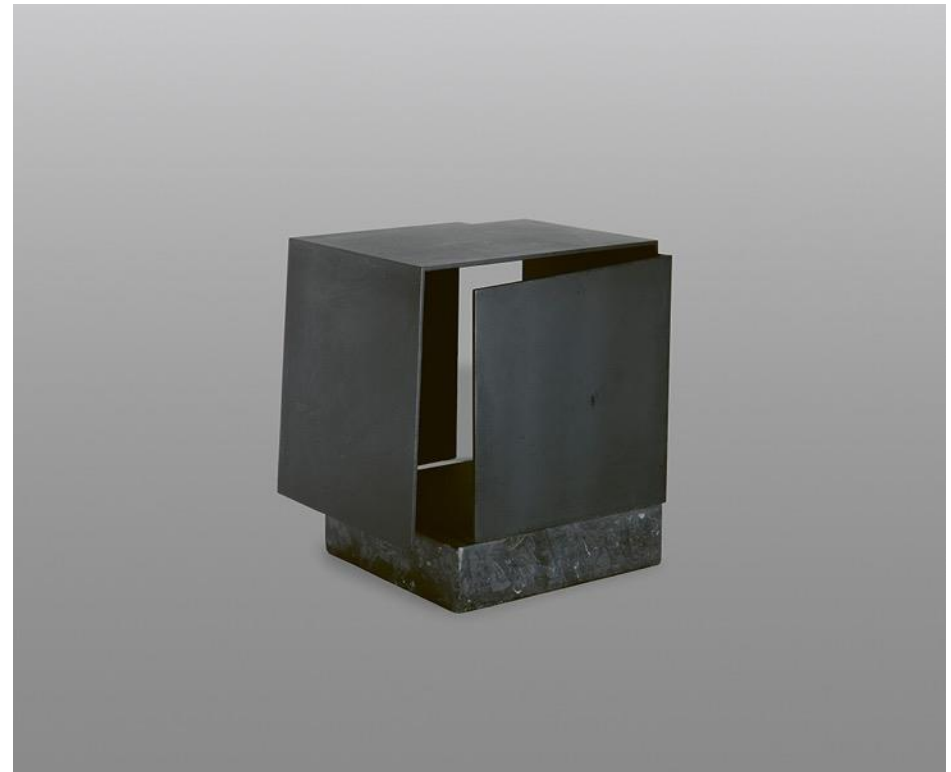
Inv. no. E00050

A sacral space, and not merely a geometric form or a purely theoretical exploration of size or number, but rather an enclosure, house, shadow and refuge. A still place for concentration, a linear stone circle sequestered in the agitated space of the world. A complex yet elemental formal enclosure, a place of empty hours, speaking of what moves but also the motionless and silent. The *boxes* by **Jorge Oteiza** Embil (Orio, 1908-San Sebastián, 2003) accommodate the mind with their titles often throwing up enigmas about their content: “metaphysical box”, an ontological dwelling place. A multiplicity of meanings, their images are transmuted into ideas, the sculpture put through an implacable process of reduction, for all intents an exercise of propositions, a method of inner investigation. A new kind of laboratory.

A journey towards knowledge by means of questions, advancing in the dark in manifold directions, the box refutes space when, once unfolded as an “open box” or perhaps in a slow becoming, it endeavours to liberate the uncertainties enclosed inside it —light communicating as if through words— and its sides appearing to unfurl, as if they retained a memory of their future, in a slow blossoming, anamorphosis or demultiplication of movement, going from stillness to displacement, like Duchamp’s nude descending a staircase. Shadows of non-being confused with the plane of being, unfolding before our eyes, before our active gaze, the image of a contradiction, coffer and unfolding, centre and motor, lucid phases in a process that conceals and reveals a demultiplying phenomenon, perchance a still frame that captures a purity of style not far from the air of some machines or objects of mathematical exactitude. An absolute contraction following expansion.

And so we come to Mallarmé, evoked in his practice, or Duchamp (at last), because Oteiza’s endeavour is an attempt to revise artistic forms and their endless analysis, almost to exhaustion. And also their endless renewal. Mallarmé, as Oteiza wrote, intuited his system: “for me it is a revelation to find my own words (...) and my very concepts on aesthetic temporality which one can see were imbued by Mallarmé”, the Basque artist would write in 1943. Or: “the central emptiness (...) is true madness.”

Is the word the sleeping voice or is it silence?



Between creating and silencing, trying to build or abandon his work, caught up in the elevation of strange geometries, Oteiza came up with an attitude able to bring together these extremes: to contradict space. And so

his work was constituted with exceptions —sometimes resolved in sets of exceptions— and the sculpture addressed in cycles, quasi-strophic groupings of experimentation that lead to a study of their potential, arriving at a conclusion. And starting all over again. His sculpture becomes a kind of writing to be deciphered, a device for meaning, now recalling the birth and conclusion of the arts in what Octavio Paz called an invisible zone. Emptiness and resistance as the artist's emblem? Something he would repeat in the “empty” constructions which contain unities, like this *Metaphysical Box by Conjunction of Two Trihedrons. Homage to Leonardo/ Utsgoikoa* (1965-1974).

And of course, in negating he makes a declaration, and such a statement becomes an aggrandizement of space: we take space and gain the world, returning us to ideas looking for the embodiment of visible space. A delayed memorable voyage, a proposed “disorientation” that journeys towards formal disappearance, like the “empty box”, the mind, from the stillness of its former dwelling place, displaced to other destinations, taking over the meanings of time. The time of nothingness takes place in the box conceived by Oteiza.

“The word of God is silence,” he would write in 1963 in his celebrated *Quousque Tandem...! Ensayo de interpretación estética del alma vasca* [Quousque tandem...! Essay on the aesthetic interpretations of the Basque soul]. Is it not strange that the author of a work with a significant rational component, lines and forms, space, would proclaim the supreme value of the spirit, the religious condition of visual consciousness? Jorge fighting with himself, with his own mind, and, between reconciliations or estrangements, illusion versus mask, his work stands like a living space, striking a balance built from intensities, discussions or agreements. An immensity derived from totality, as Richard Serra might put it. Restlessly tackling the construction of his boxes, “man always measuring”, in the words of Oteiza in that book. Questions on questions, it is as if the sculptor's restlessness had been endowed with an extraordinary gift, that of stillness, but of course a stillness riven with tensions. Calm in tense nothingness. Like taking a stance,

Oteiza's attitude, focused on the sculpture, leaves it behind to reflect on the artist and, in broader and more enduring terms, on the meaning of creation.

“Man always immobilizing”: I can see Oteiza, thinking with remarkable acuity, and the vision shows a position of the artist, inasmuch as he constructs his enclosures through a biased reading of the spiritual in art, delimiting spaces which become metaphysical proposals that then seem to adumbrate the future, just as Piglia explains how he read Kafka: concentrating the gaze, inverting the motivation and establishing new correlations in order to, in this way, rehearse a new version in space. The Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence, says Kafka. Having inverted the relationships, the vision envisages other new ones which, with the privilege of seeing, in such radical condensations, take the vision to the limit in a new order born from the inversion of original meaning, like an effective visibilization of impossibility. **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**



Pablo Armesto

Estelar 8.50

2018

Lacquered MDF board, fibre optic, LED lighting, aluminium and stainless steel

145 x 36 x 44 cm

Inv. no. 557239

Like the character invented by Nerval, **Pablo Armesto** (Schaffhausen, 1970) walks alone, singing a mysterious hymn, like a song arising from another place of existence, in such a way that the road seems to rise, its star growing by the pace. The artist's fluid ability to conceive images that appear to carry implicit a serenity that comes from questioning produces incandescent works like true books of questions, with Armesto further exploring an investigative mode of thinking that affords a distilled stillness from the poetic geometry of the thin threads of light from which his world is made. Like a night-time gift, his is an inner experience turned outwards to the world of images with the appearance of an unfolding of fleeting apparitions between dispersion and concentration, between patent or imploded forms. It comes as no surprise that some of them appear to be works in progress or of expansive emptiness, as suggested by some titles. Nomadic images, wandering allegories crossing borders, a stellar ledger of spindles of light, when we contemplate his overall body of work. Experiencing these images, I believe that it is possible for art to evoke our time, and even further, for his works to return to the world of the immemorial silence of painting, to the luminous creations of artists like Vermeer or De la Tour, those mysterious beings trapped in the folds of time. Between the questions of light and of space, like Rembrandt's shimmering holes or Friedrich's frozen seas.

Meaning seems fragile as we contemplate Armesto's constructions, like this *Estelar 8.50* (2018), because, even as one intuits the temporal complexity, this time situated in front of your eyes, the space-time dimensions are breached inasmuch it ushers us into them, to a path further beyond, as the title of one of his works tells us, like a sentient, supplicant precipitate of the meeting between an active centre of matter and energetic

immateriality, lightness twinned to the apparition of the powerful image. As if Armesto were subscribing to Duchamp's dialogue between "appearance" and "apparition" in *À l'infinif* (1966), an examination of multidimensional geometry: "the eminent object is an apparition". Images that dwell inside us, because, for Armesto, creating is not simply churning out images, but maturing a reflection produced by the mind.

Lux as the queen of all symbols, the black and white stone, like the poem of peace on Josef Sima, Armesto's constructions burn in the square of the eye. His works often oscillate between light and dark, unfolded in open silence, as if striving for revelation through these original forms. *Glaciar* and *Clave negra* are other titles redolent of this voyage that takes him from Rubens's Ceres to severe ineffable Mondrian, the Black Stone of Paradise and the fragment of the Wreck of Hope in Friedrich's sea of ice: an immersion in the unsayable invisible, like narratives rising from the mystery of sleep.

Enclosures that seem to conspire to disappearance, light forms expanding in a certain patronage of dynamism and which, in doing so, intangible, evoke the illusion of a new three-dimensional world. A creation that evokes a kind of writing where light can be revealed in the air: shafts of light, flashes, lines whimsically described in space, thin threads of light, forms in motion—"cast shadows", as Marcel might say—at times emulating the vertigo of a journey of nothingness over nothingness, the incorporeal matter—the torrent of its particles—over the apparent nothingness of space until constructing networks that at once give shape to a new entity, reminding us that time is the material of art unveiled in space. Meditating on the enigmas of light and undertaking experimentation into the possibility of transfiguring forms of this impalpable flash, an endeavour to sound out unknown entities that trail their incandescent light through space, his work takes shape no so much in the physical space where things move, but in some other unknown mysterious location, the intermediate realm of vibrations where the perception of the beholder of his works can be sourced.

This movement crossing through the darkness towards the light is an essential element in worlds like those of Klee and, as such, Armesto's

light constructions lead us toward a beautiful divestment populated by the essentiality of a core nucleus of mystery. In the becoming of light there is an ambivalence between the space and the place to which it leads, the palpable and the emergence towards the irruption of another space. A journey through the artistic object, from the place in which we find ourselves, with forms and the gaze, like a great beyond, with light as the vehicle of visibility, of what comes later.

There, in these condensations of light, like rehearsals of appearance and disappearance, in these widened circles that possess a centre inhabited by fugues, is where one can still hear the lingering song of an artist ready to consecrate silence, a poetic meditation displaced to the limit where Armesto hopes the miracle will then be possible. Like in the vertigo of a threshold, his is an endeavour to embrace withdrawal and darkness as spaces of protection, subspaces that, similar to vibratory incandescence, and palpitating energies, set us out on a path towards a time that, as Baudrillard said, could carry the hope of being unbounded and, as such, elevate the possibility of transcendence. Like in Margaret Cavendish's book, *The Blazing World*, it seems as if Armesto sets out on a voyage between parallel universes. Like in this *Estelar 8.50*, a hidden space of the Earth shines forth, another world one needs to enter from the white flatness of the North Pole. Ah, how the world shines under its light. **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**



Pablo Palazuelo

Yantra III

1984

oil on canvas

200.5 x 200.3 cm

Inv. no. 2576

¹ “Palazuelo became heated when trying to explain to me that, if it were not for straight lines, this painting would not exist (...). For him, the painting is not where the world ends but where it begins. It’s not enough to make a connection; the painting must give birth to a new life. The painter does not work to fulfil his ambitions; what

Nature was one of the abiding concerns underpinning the practice of **Pablo Palazuelo** de la Peña (Madrid, 1915-2007), possibly an early revelation during his walks in the wintery forest of Villaines-sous-Bois. A year’s withdrawal from the world of art galleries and contact with artists in Paris where he had arrived a few years previously, in 1948. “God help us” he once wrote, alone, spending that winter in the damp woods, almost consumed between oak and hazel trees. In 1951, this knight of solitude would return to another fertile withdrawal in Paris, to more *solitudes*, working without fail at number thirteen Rue Saint-Jacques, until the mid-sixties. When he paints this *Yantra III*, it is now 1984, having returned to Spain and found Monroy, a fortified town in Cáceres, where he would compose pictures with this same title, paintings on the centre of energy. Another place removed from the world, immerse in nature, as would be his frequent sojourns in La Peraleda, in Galapagar (Madrid), where he lived until his final days.

A slow painter, Palazuelo, a grammatical painter in the words of Bernard Dorival, he could never allow himself to renounce working with the line, as he confessed in an interview in 1955 with Will Grohman, an exegete of Paul Klee: “Palazuelo s’échauffe en essayant de m’expliquer que tel tableau ne peut exister que par des lignes droites (...). Pour lui le monde n’aboutit pas dans le tableau, mais il y prend naissance. La correspondance ne suffit pas, le tableau doit créer une vie nouvelle. La peintre ne travaille pas pour suffire à ses ambitions, mail il veut contribuer à l’ensemble de l’évolution universelle. Sa mission, comparable à celle du poète et du philosophe, tend ainsi à être mise in pratique, en tant qu’il contribue à modifier le monde actuel des hommes et des choses.”¹ Or, as Tharrats would add on Palazuelo, a “clean and precise” line, an imaginative introvert.

Yantra III is a declared exercise in “letting the lines speak for themselves”, a lineage of lines and forms that also become a labyrinth

he is bent on doing is to spur the overall evolution of the universe. And, like that of a poet or philosopher, this is how his mission takes form, inasmuch as it helps to change the existing world of men and things.”

leading to a plane that, once expanded, would allow him to address his equally rigorous sculpture. The line as image and emblem of movement in space, activating it, but also a true vision, shaping the world, a vehicle for energy which, in the artist's own words, is able to make the invisible visible. Palazuelo, a poet painter, and for Bonnefoy an heir to Rimbaud, an intense and reflexive artist exploring an unknown language, another form of beauty, was a fully abstract creator and experimenter with the reduction to synthesis of the forms of the universe: "the most specific and noble forms, the most powerful and strange chords", as he said in 1948. And then, the echoes of Klee, conceiving works that show the diligent worker, the tireless thinker of lines, the "austere painter", as Joan Miró called him. In the end, Klee had been a key reference in Palazuelo's encounter with abstraction.

Palazuelo said that "the word *yantra* comes from the Sanskrit root *yam*, meaning 'to sustain' or 'to hold'. It is a two-dimensional diagram of forces. Above all, *yantra* is a figure of consciousness, a figure of conception, because the graphic structure or sustaining diagram is the formal equation of a specific energy. The visualization and continued manipulation of the apparently static forms of the structure stir it from its inertia, with the diagram then emerging invested with a self-generative energy able to alternately transform physical experience into psychic experience. Experimentation, via manipulation and transformative composition, activates the energy of the image, and so the image becomes the experience itself. This conception of *yantra* whose centre (*bindu*) is intensity, is an open system, given that it can transform itself endlessly. The works I call *Yantra* are not related with tantric meditation. Tantric *yantras* are mostly compositions based on various combinations of triangles. I am interested in the relationship of these triangles with sounds. Mantras are letters or combinations of letters, sounds that relate with the different spaces that conform the *yantra*."

Palazuelo tries "to see the previously unseen, to know a part of the unknown to me", a maxim that reflects on the complex meaning of artistic creation: the world is a form able to reveal the idea. Forms that, more than coming together, disclose their inner life, their 'lineage': the permanent begetting of one form in another, preserving the print of their genesis.

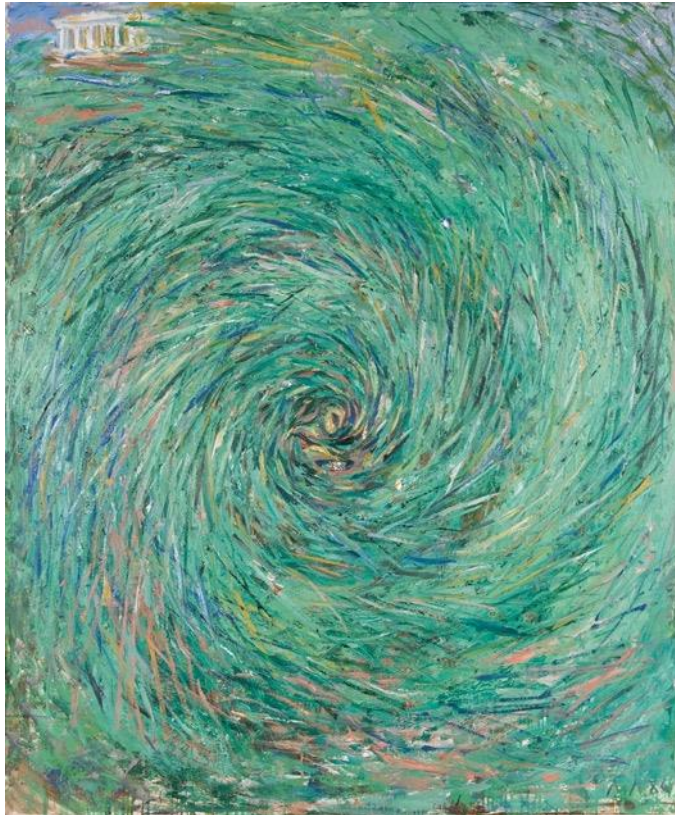
Palazuelo paints the world without forgetting the murmur of the life of the arcane—*Imaginalia*, as he called one of his poems—in a vague reference to darkness and the tellurian. In 1967 the painter wrote: "nature tirelessly imitates itself, and thus it is ever more specialized, ever more individualized, until creating new forms. Metamorphosis is the goal of a 'mysterious' self-imitation that to some extent constitutes a law. A law of nature that awakes in man (here, a resonator) a force that, at once, can provoke that law, reinforce it and direct it. An operation takes place in nature that provokes in us a similar—or perhaps different— operation that, in turn, reverberates over the former, amplifying it, or maybe jointly transforming it, with the two then becoming one. Reality has no blurred lines. Only accidents (another reality) of vision left by the passage of time." **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**

Alfonso Albacete*Narciso I*

1986

oil on canvas

208 x 174 cm

Inv. no. 2504

The craft of painting could well define this true meta-painter, **Alfonso Albacete** (Antequera, 1950), able to send up poetic hymns in his splendid performances from 1975 and 1976, speaking of a quasi-actionist past like the bodily marks that allow us to grasp a fiercely intense life as a painter

ruled by a complete absence of distractions. Performances that then found their way by osmosis into his so-called *war paintings* (ca. 2000), a depiction of corporeal architecture, a battle of the painter daubed with the wreckage of the studio, or transmuted into a pointillist body like a revisitación of Oskar Schlemmer's triadic ballet (*Das Triadische Ballett*, 1922).

I sometimes imagine him twinned with the patron saint of abstraction of our time (the term is Julián Gállego's), to Fernando Zóbel, a collector of his work, like many other Cuenca-based artists including Gerardo Rueda. In fact, meta-painting concerns led Albacete to conceive works in which various paintings would appear or indeed his own exhibitions, like a picture within a picture, allusions to the history of painting or, moreover, the painter himself making the picture, inserting himself inside it in some sort of specular resource that earned him an inclusion in the exhibition at the Prado museum, *Meta-painting. A Journey to the Idea of Art* (2016-2017).

As Zóbel used to say, art lives off tension and dies from distractions. Albacete is a traveller from the abstract gaze to the figurative reference, from fire to stillness, from the fragment to the *totus*, from the plateau to the sky, from the cave to the home, often recalling the joy of life in the studio as a refuge, like a reborn Xavier de Maistre in his *A Journey Around My Room* (1794). Between nocturnality and blindness, as if intoxicated contemplating the landscape from the refuge of a pergola, Albacete has always been a painter with a tireless gaze, partial to a certain exercise in a tracking scanning view and the form of representing his surrounding world until being able to conclude that his approach to painting is produced in a unsettling, eccentric fashion, that is to say, even though one can recognise certain of his painterly influences, there is something uneasy and radical in his way of confronting art—in making his way through the darkness in several directions at once, as Palazuelo might put it—until finding himself in a place he feels belongs to him, an often rousing and personal yet distressing no-man's land.

In this regard, he has frequented an extremely complex abstraction, being able to propitiate a rendezvous between a certain geometrization—lines or planes, colour fields—and the incorporation of apparently random

elements. In Albacete, his wide-ranging experimentations—carried out in cycles that revolve around nature, object, innerness, figures, wefts and self-portraits—intersect at points, through lingering as a narrative, as the painted writing of a numinous diary.

A joyous voyager between extremes, his painting can also be a surface of greys or a space to exalt colour, like in this beautiful *Narciso* (1986), seemingly depicting ineffable geographies and likewise references to an ashen space, fiery places of greys and browns, like the incredible canvas from the mid-eighties, *Dos calles conducen al sur* (1986)—hopeful avenues that appear to go from greyness to a new dawning that will come from the south—in the collection of Spain's national museum. Or indeed paintings of devastated looking streets, as if battered by the winds of gramage, I am thinking of the peripheries of Sironi contemplating his *Santa Águeda, Norte-Sur: Judith* (1986). Greys in *Los cazadores en la nieve* (1988) and superb blues in his views of *Viena* (1985). His painting looks dense and complex, almost baroque, or sometimes it can be found at moments of extraordinary aerial grace, like a gift. A painter of earth, but also of water and sky, of the solid and the fluid, painterly impasto but also smoothness, there is in something cavelike to his approach, exploring the shadows of one who saw the world reflected beyond the cavern and, mysteriously, will not cease throughout his whole trajectory to question the unknown.

Elevating images in space, his painting possesses illumination, cutting through the forms that conceive this will to explore the visible. Elevating symbols, while Albacete at once paints for a need, on an endless journey among the codes of painting. A path evincing that his thinking as a painter revolves around an always inner displacement. He depicts inner spaces, and even more so when they are exterior, immediately impregnated by the mood of the painter, pierced by his gaze as a painter. He journeys at will between abstraction and figuration, through the baroque and geometry,

immerse in doubts about who and what we are, also asking himself about images, something that in his practice seem to settle in a world of lethargy, creating mysterious associations, his painting submerged in the arcane of his inner worlds. He dares to try to capture the blinding light of summer and the reverberating night of eclipse, something he has never shied from in his career, recalling his chilling *Aire* (1987). Condensations forming around stories, narrations of a stupefied contemplator who watches the world, with his depictions travelling to a mysterious universe, like a suspended space replete with evocations more than certainties, intoxicated with poeticity. Albacete appears to peek a self-fascinated glimpse at the reality of the world transmuted in painting: is this painted world real, more than the one he sees with his eyes? He endeavours to grasp reality, yet without the throbbing beat of a poetic inner reservoir, a recondite place, a space of resistance, the elevation of an intoxicated cosmos in painting. An exteriorized interior, an interiorized exterior? It is all the same, for Albacete shows us that the painterly space—as if emulating a remote homeland—is the only place where one can find a set of images that, emanating from the visible, are resolved only in the act of creation, and so art is a refuge, agreeing with the words of another artist: “and so, deprived of repose, the idea of space seems to endlessly seek the infinite of august presence (refuge), moving, in the infinite interior of human impotence obsessed with a vision, at times agitated and other times feverish, always heading disconsolately, moreover in vain, towards the unlimited.”² In its agitation, art also proposes the oblivion or dream of a new beginning, the truth of a new life in painting. **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**

² Pablo Palazuelo, Cuaderno de París, 1953 (ed. A. de la Torre), en: Pablo Palazuelo. Paris, 13 rue Saint-Jacques (1948-1968). Madrid: Fundación Juan March; Alzuza: Museo Oteiza, 2010-2011. Courtesy Pablo Palazuelo Foundation.

Fernando Zóbel*The Bishop's Garden V*

1978

oil on canvas and pencil

99 x 122.2 cm

Inv. no. P05805

The journey of **Fernando Zóbel** de Ayala (Manila, 1924-Rome, 1984) towards abstraction from his early fauvist paintings, took place during the fifties, following an epiphany during a Rothko exhibition in Providence in 1955. He had studied Philosophy and Literature in Harvard, before enrolling at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Moving within the circle of painters in Boston and coming across the different and unique Alfonso Ossorio, an artist and collector of European informalism, he developed his

practice against that background of US abstract expressionism. Zóbel would have his first solo shows in 1954 and 1955 in Boston and Providence, after which he showed his work in New York at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery (1965) for which he garnered much critical acclaim and received a return visit from Rothko himself in person.

In the late-fifties he travelled to Europe and settled in an artistically bustling Madrid. A collector of that abstract generation, he conceived the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español in Cuenca, which was opened in 1966 with his collection. The art of the time in Spain could not be understood without him, without his intense activity, living the life of a painter to the full, infinitely curious about virtually the whole embrace of culture. And meanwhile, his painting found its way into major exhibitions in the sixties: *Before Picasso; After Miró* (Guggenheim Museum, 1960) or *Modern Spanish Painting* (Tate Gallery, 1962). In those years his abstractions grew more radical, restricted to the use of black and white, conveying a calligraphic and essentialist language ascribed to a brand of abstraction that was lyrical yet at once bound to informalism and its visual stimuli, signs that seem to arise from a certain compulsiveness of the hand, as if the stroke were the prolongation of the gesture of a single movement, as propounded by oriental masters. Following a brief geometric period in the seventies, coinciding with his participation in *12 Spanjorer* (Göteborgs Konstmuseum, 1970), his painting shifted towards a universe built by means of dissolved blotches.

The painterly gesture wavered between reflection and meditative asceticism, like metaphysical signs trying to represent what once was at a given instant and then vanished, the memory of what was seen; in a primordial place, art and nature. And also submitting to a new reinterpretation certain images from the history of art that had caught his attention during his assiduous visits to museums, together with the poetic emotion of the glimpsed and sensed in nature, especially water, the green of river banks and the landscape of Cuenca, atmospheric phenomena. Like in this *The Bishop's Garden V* (1978), we come across fundamentally indeterminate composed visual elements, which gives his practice a certain parallel with the *opera aperta*, an energetic painting that casts doubts on

what is concluded, what is and could be finished, the deliberate restriction of the already painted and the openness of the field of interpretative possibilities, right up to the mutability of the manifold readings that this world of signs and forms affords to the observer. Redolent of the aporia of making the invisible visible, some of his late works would have to be interpreted as a swan song, a late apotheosis of this painter who died just short of the threshold of sixty. And so this is how we would have to understand the exuberance of some on his final paintings, beset by powerful notes of colour, sparkling stains of blue or glowing tones that slide it towards an extraordinary sense of freedom in painterly diction.

Posthumous exhibitions won him recognition in places where his life had been symbolically played out, in Orient and Europe: for instance, the Museum of Philippine Art in Manila, and Fundación Juan March in Madrid and Museo de Arte Abstracto Español, in Cuenca. Survey shows were held in Harvard in 1987, the Fogg Art Museum and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, in Madrid in 2003. And soon the Prado museum will recall his richly-led life in painting and the history of art: *The Future of the Past. Fernando Zóbel and the History of Art*. The enduring validity of his work well into this twenty-first century only further underscores the permanence of this artist in the world of forms. Beauty as a powerful form of consolation. And, of course, we could write that the images painted by Zóbel still burn. **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**

Gerardo Rueda*Star*

1960

oil on canvas

97 x 130 cm

Inv. no. 557224

Between 1943 and 1945, after reading a classic book by Guillaume Janneau on Cubism, **Gerardo Rueda** Salaberry (Madrid, 1926-1996), a shiftless Law student, started copying cubist paintings he admired, Juan Gris mainly, while at once laying his own groundwork as a neo-cubist by creating others. And this is how he began his career as an artist: observing the painting that had short-circuited twentieth-century art. In addition, because of his French background he travelled regularly to Paris, where he visited galleries and museums. However, it was his meeting with Zóbel—in the late-fifties—that proved a capital moment in joining the abstract venture of Spain's first democratic museum, Museo de Arte Abstracto Español in Cuenca (1966).

In 1959 he made his first grey paintings, among which we could classify this spatialist work. From a distinct structure often imposed by the aforementioned pigments to composing different flat surfaces in his painting, the artist evolved to a spatial moment: works like this *Astro* (*Star*), 1960, were the first in the suite from the sixties that have often been called his “grey paintings”. A spatialist painting that includes discreet, at times almost imperceptible thickenings or impastos, which are often just soft chords: notes, commas, instants that cut across a monochrome space, like a symbolic and infinite but also musical space.

After leaving behind the influence of Nicolas de Staël, indebted to his trips to Paris, he moved towards what would be his later monochrome period, grounded in a concern for light, volume and shadows, obsessions that were to run through practically the whole of Gerardo Rueda's practice.

During his trajectory, and even while running contrary to accepted thought, Rueda defended that concision could be just as valid as rhetoric. A painter who eschewed all passing trends, one of his mottoes was: “you have



to make serious efforts not to keep up to date.” Even in the knowledge that this deliberate avoidance of the mainstream was, precisely, the truest sense of a vanguard attitude. His admiration for the exactitude of Gris and cubist practice led him to use collage throughout his whole life, at times using all kinds of paper, other times with objects. Collages that incorporate various papers, remnants of drawings or typography, but also bits of wood or ordinary everyday or personal elements, often in boxes reminiscent of stages, redolent of other artists admired by Rueda: Cornell, Klee, Morandi, Motherwell, Schwitters or Torres-García.

A stalwart defender of balance and order in his compositions, a deviser of secret or feigned geometries, a part of his work during the eighties spoke of the transfer to painting of the effects of his collages. A fiction of thinned papers emerging from blackness, painted with light colours frequently of a naturalist essence that revealed the effects of layerings and clippings, and even of hand-torn sheets.

Making the most of emotion as a point of departure for the relationship between the spectator and the work of art, Gerardo Rueda had exhibitions at the leading art galleries in Madrid of the time: Biosca, Juana Mordó and Theo. In 1992 Rueda was commissioned to make two monumental gates for the Spanish Pavilion at the Universal Expo in Seville. And also in the nineties he created the stained-glass windows for the central nave in the Cathedral of Cuenca, which he called 'De la Tierra al Paraíso'. After 1994, the year Polígrafa and Cercle D'Art published a monograph on the artist authored by Juan Manuel Bonet, Rueda had a major retrospective exhibition, *Trayectos*, which toured the main national museums in South America. In 1996 the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM) hosted what was to be his last exhibition in life. After his death his collages were shown at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. In 2001, the same museum organized the first retrospective in Spain of the artist's work in a national museum, curated by Tomàs Llorens and Alfonso de la Torre. "Silence reigns under the bridges / as the murmur of a drop recalls, / and also the shadow cast of a wing", we wrote in 1999. **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**

Esteban Vicente*Untitled*

1956

oil on canvas

101.5 x 121.5 cm

Inv. no. 1040

The work of **Esteban Vicente** (Turégano, 1903-New York, 2001) rose from an intimate conviction of the sensorial qualities of painting. The understanding of creation from a silent attitude, in which the painter seems to have installed himself permanently, alone, with the painting. A work generally situated in the wake of US abstract expressionism, which Vicente experienced first-hand, could align him to a certain often overlooked tendency within Spanish painting which foregrounds the vision of the lyrical sentiment in creation. Speaking of his relationships during his time in the USA, one ought to underscore his admiration for the work of Milton Avery, Arthur Dove and Marsden Hartley. In the fifties he was friends with Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Franz Kline and other leading artists from the New York School. In any case, his work should be assigned to the long list of Spanish artists who understood painting from postulates removed from the clichés of Black Spain. I am thinking of many of the painters who joined the venture of the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español opened in Cuenca in 1966: Mompó, Rueda, Sempere, Torner or Zóbel. And also Hernández Pijuan or Ràfols Casamada.

A painter in spiritual exile, Vicente was by no means a *rara avis*: we only have to recall the diaspora of coeval Spanish painters in Paris: Feito, Muñoz, Palazuelo, Rueda, Sempere or Saura. Or his coeval José Guerrero, with whom in would coincide in New York, the city that also played host to César Manrique in the mid-sixties. "I am an American painter because I came to live in this country when I was young. But art transcend frontiers", Esteban Vicente wrote. Logical enough for a painter who, from the creativity in the whirlwind of abstract expressionism, always kept one eye on European cultural tradition.



A work that foregrounds colour, something that informalist painting from the sixties often eschewed, his painterly palette defended the existence of Azorín's brighter, clearer Spain, another vision of modernism, colours applied with blurred contours, like imprecisely defined nebulae. A hymn to the invisible, diffuse yet highly restrained brushwork, a painting of Rothkian horizons, an essentially mental gesture, redolent of Philip Guston, Vicente's creations are also at the opposite pole of conceptual rigour. Poetic composition and vibrant colour, colour is light, basic notes, like this *Untitled* painting from 1956. Nor should we overlook Vicente's famously astute use of collage throughout his career. In this way, underscoring a link with a contemporary tradition, for instance the collages by Gris, Picasso, Rueda or Torner.

A painting balanced between freedom and know-how, independence and sensibility, expression and restraint. A painter of reason and method, lending attention first and foremost to his inner voice and inner landscapes, eluding intuition and improvisation, propounding the existence of a creative *corpus* conceived as a torrent of luminous ideas, never free from a personal timbre.

As has been said on occasion, his output, which he maintained to the end, evokes Picasso's equally boundless creativity until his final days. And so both of them became a prototype of a way of being of the Spanish artist, tireless and intense right up to the end. Both key to Spanish contemporary history of art, in which the history of the outsider, the exception, plays a central role. **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**

Antonio López García*The Apparition of Little Brother*

1960

bronze

56 x 78.3 x 5 cm

Inv. no. E00117

Transcendental realism or gravity of the real, either or, in any case a desire to go beyond the surface appearance of things, a longing to transcend the *juanramoniana* or Juan Ramón Jiménez-esque stillness of objects, the music of quiet things opposed to the temptation towards intoxicating postponement as propounded by the poet, the approach to artmaking adopted by **Antonio López García** (Tomelloso, 1936) has always been that of an artist accustomed to working by settling his poetic and highly symbolic gaze on the most ordinary things: people, attitudes, still objects or interior spaces. This artist has advanced through his career like a tornado, spinning self-absorbed around itself, untouched, between dwelt immobility and a paean to inner worlds, home to remembered and forgotten memories. An interior space or home: shelter, refuge and a narrow door opening on the world, recalling Bachelard, dwelling places inhabited by dreams, at times by sad, grey dreams, spaces for the hope of others. Used to reflecting on something so complex as that restless place crying out to the void, his creative world seems to contemplate the real in a fraught balance between affect and lack of complacency. Also recalling that our time has thrown up artists able to create from absolute entropy, because as Louis-Ferdinand Céline wrote “Everything that is interesting happens in the shadows; we know nothing of the real life of the human race.” Representing mankind and his surroundings, in his solitude and nakedness, has been the primary and deliberately contrarian goal of Antonio López, an explorer of images underpinned by quotidianity, a hall of mirrors stormed by paradox. His works are also embroiled in a strange reflection on the passing of the clock, on the becoming of time, they often seem to be invaded with a contagious family resemblance. A world where stillness reigns, yet, as we said, an active stillness, what we have called before, when applied to artists, introverted imagination. A disemboweler of shadows, López’s strength is grounded in

an urge to thaumaturgically reconstruct a kind of bronze *memorabilia*, a minute elevation of the landscape of memory. To be contemporary and singular, irreducible, he casts a gaze over human representation that evokes reflections on a Giacomettian world: the surrounding world, observation of reality, fixation on a figure in space, the tremor of the gaze, still yet insistent, vibrating over the embers of the visible, disclosing it to be more complex, more fruitful, in the postponement of meticulously drawn details, held on pause, than in the elevation of a fiction. His is the courage of narrating, with a certain remorsefulness, a mute vibration, the mysterious living of daily life.

Like in this magical bronze *The Apparition of Little Brother* from 1960, the artist is able, in silence, to offer his creations to be shared. His experimentation has always tried to sift the possibility of a singular man, a mortal and at once self-transcendent god-like being. **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**



Martín Chirino*Öology*

1973

gilded and polished bronze

30 x 20 x 5 cm

Inv. no. E00033

Ángel Ferrant was the first artist to write at length about the work of **Martín Chirino** (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1925-Madrid, 2019). He did so in August 1959, two years before he died, in an article with the unquestionable title “Martín Chirino is a sculptor”. At the time, Cirlot said the title of the text was epigraphic, or, as we could now add, almost tautological.

For Ferrant, a substantial element of Chirino’s sculpture was its naturalness, in the sense of sincerity. That is to say, the absence of pretence in his sculptural work, made with simplicity and austere serenity right from his first *black-queen* sculptures, recently showcased at the foundation that bears his name in Las Palmas. A ‘living’ and distinguished work, made from scantily adjectival effusive expansion. The materials used in those early works—roots of Spanish fir or lemon tree wood and volcanic stone—already contained a lot of what would be the artistic epiphany of the sculptor from the Canaries. Often autochthonous materials, a constant in many artists from the islands, from the conception of a vision of modernism truly bound to the concerns of contemporary twentieth-century artists, overwhelmed by the upheaval of the primitive. In Chirino’s work it is not as if he has lost sight



of the primitive, but that this issue is more ancestral and consubstantial to his artistic being. In 1953 a composition in tribute to Joan Miró became his first wrought-iron sculpture to use welding, a place—the blindness of the sparking forge—that, we know, was a constant throughout the life’s work of this “fable-forging ironsmith”. Soon after, in 1955, there came his first homage to the sculptor Julio González, about whom he once underscored “the violence of his powerful silence”. This was the year when he left the Canaries and Chirino was by now a fully abstract sculptor. As a new member of the El Paso group, he had a one-person exhibition at the Ateneo de Madrid, with a catalogue prefaced by José Ayllón, one of the group’s “hermeneuts”. Then 1958 proved a critical year for Chirino, showing his work in several group shows: at the Sala Negra in Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in March and at Colegio Mayor San Pablo in a show significantly called *Four Painters and a Sculptor*.

The El Paso group had its most symbolic moment in April 1959, with an exhibition at Biosca, the most important gallery of the time, presenting a special issue of *Papeles de Son Armadans* dedicated to the group which, nevertheless was on the verge of breaking up. For *Son Armadans* Chirino wrote an article called “The Ploughshare and the Plough”, almost a declaration of principles, which began ineffably: “When I discovered the life of men I was catapulted towards a tireless flight”, underscoring that art,

which arises from the earth, is a “harmonious and necessary” labour. Chirino connected with the roots of the art of his time. For the artists in the El Paso group, creating was a necessary act in which they were also committed to undertaking acts unreservedly, not just illustrating antiquated myths.

Moving centre stage then in the theoretical and artistic thinking of the time, a turning point came in Chirino’s career when his sculptures were chosen for an exhibition in 1960 at MoMA in New York and other US cities. Seeing his work on view in New York, one could understand Millares’s touching words: “there is something of tickling and whispering in the little squares of his empty game, divested like the simple sticks in a cemetery forgotten by the dead.”

Chirino’s sculpture always revolves around a certain organic physicality, on a journey in which, in the late-fifties, the shift from the horizontal to the vertical was frequent, from an observation of the reutilization of sculpture on ground level towards a verticality with an immediate goal of ascension. A pure expression of inner activity, as Cirlot rightfully put it in the aforementioned article, certain areas of his sculpture became benchmarks comparable in painting at that time, for instance, in this point, to the gestural —nervous and ineffable— elements of Franz Kline for an understanding of the kind of reconstruction undertaken by Chirino, a cyclopean effort to pour the immateriality of the gesture into the emptiness of the air. **ALFONSO DE LA TORRE**