



Proyecto Gran Sur de Fernando Prats en la 54° Biennale di Venezia

Fernando Prats instaló su proyecto "Gran Sur" en los Arsenales de esa antigua ciudad, el lugar más visitado durante la Biennale di Venezia (Bielal de Venecia), que se extenderá hasta el 27 de noviembre de 2011. El montaje está conformado por tres obras: una intervención en torno al impacto de la erupción volcánica en Chaitén (2008); una serie de piezas

alusivas al terremoto en la zona centro sur de Chile (2010); y una instalación con letras de neón que recupera el anuncio que el explorador irlandés Ernest Shackleton habría publicado, alrededor de 1911, convocando hombres para su expedición a la Antártica.

Prats produce imágenes a partir del humo, por medio del cual consigue sedimentar fenómenos naturales como el agua propulsada por un geiser o la superficie de un inmenso glaciar. Su técnica ha sido destacada por personajes de la talla del teórico francés Paul Ardenne quien incluyó hace muy poco la obra de Fernando Prats en la actual exposición en el Espace Louis Vuitton de París, resaltándolo por haber iniciado "una forma inédita de pintar".

Fernando Prats trabajó con el teórico español Fernando Castro Flórez como curador y con el teórico y poeta chileno Antonio Arévalo como comisario. Con esta propuesta estética inspirada en Chile, su geografía y sus condiciones telúricas, Fernando Prats busca exaltar al sujeto capaz de asumir una posición heroica. El proyecto "Gran Sur" invita a una reflexión sobre el rol de la geografía en la identidad de este país.

Un elemento vertebral de su presentación en Venecia es la expedición que el mismo Prats realizó durante marzo al territorio antártico a bordo del Rompehielos de la Armada, Almirante Viel. Conmemorando el centenario del mítico anuncio que habría sido publicado en *The Times* por el explorador irlandés Ernest Shackleton, Prats instaló en la Isla Elefante el texto del mismo: "Se buscan hombres para viaje arriesgado, poco sueldo, frío extremo, largos meses de oscuridad total, peligro constante, dudoso regreso a salvo, honor y reconocimiento en caso de éxito". El texto, que anticipa tanto el heroísmo como el eventual naufragio se colocó en la fachada del Pabellón Nacional de Chile en la Bienal de Venecia. En la primera vitrina se aprecian las planchas con humo (hollín), que Prats usa para hacer registros. Y en la segunda se ve la ropa de cama que Prats rescató de la zona sur de Chile, afectada por el terremoto del 27 de febrero de 2010 y que sorprendió a millones de chilenos durmiendo (fue a las 03:34:17, hora que da nombre a esa muestra). En la fotografía *033417 Dichato* (2010) se observa cómo el artista camina por los restos del balneario de Dichato, arrasado por el terremoto y posterior tsunami. Prats lleva en sus manos las planchas tiznadas, que apoya en diferentes superficies dejándolas "marcadas".

El Pabellón Chileno en la Bienal de Venecia es un elemento determinante dentro de las políticas de internacionalización de las artes visuales de Chile. En La edición anterior, el año 2009, destacó la presentación de la obra del artista Iván Navarro en el primer pabellón propio de Chile, en Los Arsenales.

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Interior

Interior Pabellon de Chile en Venecia

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Fernando Prats' "Gran Sur" Project at the 54th Venice Biennial

Fernando Prats installed his Project "Gran Sur" (Great South) in the Arsenals of the ancient city, the most visited place during the 54th Biennial di Venezia (Venice Biennial) that will be extended until November 27th, 2011. The montage is composed of three pieces: an intervention around the impact of the volcanic eruption in Chaitén (2008); a series of pieces that allude to the earthquake in the central south of Chile (2010); and an installation with neon letters that rescues the announcement that the Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton would have published, around 1911, while recruiting men for his expedition to Antarctica.

Prats produces images with smoke, through which he manages to sediment natural phenomena with the water that is driven by a geyser or the surface of a giant glacier. His technique has been praised by figures of the stature of the French theorist Paul Ardenne, who recently included Fernando Prats' work in the current exposition at *the Espace Louis Vuitton* in Paris, admiring him for beginning "an unprecedented way of painting."

Fernando Prats worked with the Spanish theorist Fernando Castro Flórez as a curator and with the Chilean theorist and poet Antonio Arévalo as a commissary. With this aesthetic proposal inspired by the geography and the telluric conditions of Chile, Fernando Prats wants to highlight the person capable of assuming a heroic position. The "Great South" project invites people to reflect on the role that geography has on the identity of the country.

A vertebral element of his presentation in Venice is the expedition that Prats himself made during March to the Antarctic territory on the border of Rompehielos de la Armada, Almirante Viel. Commemorating the centennial of the mythical announcement that would have been published in *The Times* by the Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton, Prats installed the text in *the Isla Elefante* (Elephant Island): "*Looking for men for a dangerous journey, low pay, extreme cold, long months of total darkness, constant danger, unlikely to return safe, honor and praise if success.*" The text, which anticipates the heroism as well as the eventual shipwreck, was placed at the front of the National Chilean Pavilion in the Venetian Biennial.

In the first window there are steam irons that Prats uses to make registries. In the second, there are the bed sheets that Prats rescued from the southern zone of Chile, affected by the earthquake on February 27th, 2010, which surprised millions of sleeping Chileans (it happened at 03:34:17 a.m., an hour which the exhibition is named after). In the photograph *033417 Dichato* (2010) shows how the artist walks among the remains of the Dichato bath house, which was destroyed by the earthquake and the ensuing tsunami. Prats carries the sooty irons, which he presses against different surfaces, "marking" them.

The Chilean Pavilion in the Venetian Biennial is a determinant element within the politics of internationalizing Chilean visual arts. In the previous edition in 2009, the presentation of the piece by Iván Navarro in the first Chilean pavilion stood out in the Arsenals.



Imagen de la videoinstalación de Fernando Prats.

El artista Fernando Prats realiza una videoinstalación para la felicitación navideña de la fundación de Barcelona

ROBERTA BOSCO
Barcelona

No hay estrellas, ni abetos, ni ningún otro elemento que remita a la Navidad, exceptuando el viento helado de la Antártida, tan brutal que casi consigue trasladarse al espectador desde el vídeo que protagoniza la *Nadala 2011* de la Fundación Miró. Es el quinto año en que, en lugar de las tradicionales decoraciones, el centro marca el periodo navideño encargando una instalación *site-specific*. La *nadala* de este año, *El nacimiento del mundo II, 1925-2011*, es de Fernando Prats, artista chileno, afincado en Barcelona, que, en homenaje a Miró y para evidenciar los esfuerzos de los creadores para explorar y experimentar lo desconocido, viajó a la Antártida con una bandera que reproduce el dibujo preparatorio de Miró para *Pintura (El nacimiento del mundo)*. Esta obra de 1925, propiedad del MOMA de Nueva York, ha sido uno de los pocos préstamos importantes que no se han conseguido para la gran exposición monográfica *La escalera de la evasión*, abierta en la fundación hasta el 18 de marzo.

“Aunque se materialice en una instalación, para mí todo el proyecto es una gran pintura. Mi objetivo era establecer una relación entre el ritmo polar y el dibujo de Miró, y capturar la energía que de esto se desprende”, asegura Prats, que una vez allí plantó su bandera en el islote González, un lugar de condiciones extremas, a menos 35 grados bajo cero y con vientos de 150 kilómetros hora. “Se encuentra justo enfrente de la base científico-militar Arturo Prat, una de las más antiguas, así bautizada en honor de una derrota que los chilenos celebramos como una victoria”, cuenta el artista.

Si el mes que pasó con su equipo en la Antártida fue toda una aventura, también instalar el contenedor rojo, parecido a los edificios de la base, en el Pati de l'Olivera de la fundación fue bastante espectacular por la intervención de una gigantesca grúa que lo hizo sobrevolar los techos del arquitecto Sert. Hasta el 8 de enero el contenedor se quedará allí, para que los visitantes puedan revivir la hazaña de Prats a través del vídeo de la acción, la bandera ori-

ginal y el mapa de la zona con el recorrido del viaje, los subrayados y las notas del artista.

Prats está ya más que familiarizado con la Antártida. En 2002 fue para enterrar sus obras en el glaciar Collins. “Quería congelar mis ideas”, explica. Cuando Chile le invitó a representarle en la Bienal de Venecia de 2011, con la colaboración de su galería, la Joan Prats de Barcelona, ideó *Gran Sur*, un ambicioso proyecto inspirado en el explorador Ernest Shackleton y el anuncio que publicó en 1914: “Se buscan hombres para viaje arriesgado, poco sueldo, frío extremo, largos meses de oscuridad total, peligro constante, regreso a salvo dudoso, honor y reconocimiento en caso de éxito”.

“Respondieron 3.500 hombres, salieron 29 y todos volvieron con vida”, asegura Prats, que colocó este texto con letras luminosas tanto en la isla Elefante, donde los exploradores se salvaron tras el naufragio, como en la Bienal de Venecia. La instalación, que actualmente se exhibe en París, viajará más adelante a Chile y Polonia.



FERNANDO PRATS :: *ABOUT SHIPWRECKS AND EARTHQUAKES*



With the extraordinary experience in Venice behind and new horizons ahead, **Fernando Prats** removes the veil from his works, a heart of darkness made of utopia, hazardous journeys and the conquest of spaces going beyond any limit. *Carnet de voyage* of courageous captains.

The work by Fernando Prats, which stands out for having extraordinary rigour, and for reflecting the Chilean reality conditioned by the different geographic aspects that make it up, turns into a transcendental card to represent Chile at the 54th Venetian Biennale: **Gran Sur** is the starting and arrival point of our conversation.



For his art exhibition, Prats, a Chilean citizen based in Barcelona, has visited different places of his home country hit by natural disasters. He set out from the region of Chaitén, still inhabited because of a major volcanic eruption occurred some years ago, and later he moved to the small fishermen's bays near Concepción, struck by the earthquake of 27th February, 2010. These territories cherish the memory from the past and for the artist they represent a source of resources.

It is interesting to analyze how the issue of natural catastrophes has touched the heart of the Chilean people until reaching the souls of the artists. We should also remind that the national Pavilion of the Architecture Biennial 2010, entitled *Chile 8.8* – referring to the magnitude of that awful quake measured on the Richter scale -, was totally dedicated to the earthquake.

When we asked him what he thinks about all this, Prats replied: "Every time I plan to travel and reflect on these natural disasters, I actually find a direct link with the seismic aspect, with the energy held back in the subsoil. It is not only a geography matter, it is more complex. Think about the paintings by Roberto Matta, his *Inscapes*, his *Psychological Morphology*: they refer to the seismic energy, to the inner dynamics of the things. I connect to the places according to a travel schedule. When I say travel, though, I mean an intellectual pattern. For this reason, I give great importance to the processes and the procedures; not only materially, but also mentally. Seismic phenomena, regarded as a sensory experience, can have a wide range of levels. On the one hand, sensoriality is linked to the appeal on the people who share your work; on the other hand, it depends on the ethical intentions, such as those of Shackleton in the Antarctic. During my expedition in the town of Chaitén, for example, such intentions have been decisive."

A project that brought Prats in the Chilean geographical territories where nature “explodes or exploits”, and whose consequences are “tracked” on the artist’s map, who documented the process in a video where he gathered “the trails” of such natural phenomena.

“The relevant aspect of this geologic idea is its movement, this energy is a form of thought and intuition that I let slip on to my painting. The project carried out during the earthquake is entitled *03:34:17*, the exact time of the earthquake. It is the precise moment when human beings have to deal with strength. In these moments, the dimension of the human fragility, fear, pain, darkness, loss, etc. reduces. It is the highest breaking point in the relationship between man and nature, art and catastrophe. My feelings in front of the devastation are the same as any Chilean citizen: immeasurable grief. And as an artist, I immediately think of the restoration place. It is there that the entire working-through process of painting takes place, both existentially and materially. In Venice, the work turned up at the right moment, as it was part of a general working procedure that I already devised some years ago. I have talked about geology and painting. I should also mention the words “dynamography” and “seismography”. Words that every Chilean knows, because we bring with us the memory of several devastations.”



A process, therefore, in which he relevantly lets Nature speak and be what it is – the birds, the worms, the tree branches -, significantly, delete, leave a trail on the pictorial surface cured with smoke by the artist. Therefore, to uncover what was hidden in the depths of the work. In a nutshell, he lets shine the light peeking out from the depths of darkness. Nothing else, then, but the miracle of a revelation.

“Although we also try to detect the energy of geography, the driver of the work

is the loss, the destruction, the pain. My work is conditioned by the people who experienced the tragedy. I acted as a mediator of the art work, in order to catch such energy.”

In the presentation of his work, the Spanish curator Fernando Castro Flórez, writes: “Fernando Prats travels across his country with a map blurred by smoke, treading on a soil made into ash, inserting his papers into the cracks, gazing into a glacial horizon. His remarkable seismographic method demonstrates that the map is not only a representation of the territory but also that, following an extreme event, its testimony is inevitably sombre. The project carried out by Fernando Prats is, in every sense, epic and poetic, in which he claims that art is a travel to the unknown.”

Prats resumes the idea of painting from the point of view of an alchemist, stones his paintings, lets the branches whip them or the doves to leave the marks of the flapping of their wings on them, cries over this, over- coming the traditional elements that characterize it. What are the main difficulties to assume this different approach as a painter?

“The most important thing in painting is to know how to find the energies that can prompt this pictorial surface. The process and procedure are significant. In the works displayed in Venice, they are the journeys. For me a journey is a model of work. I plan a journey through poetic diagrams as, for example, Saint John-Joseph of the Cross or the diaries and maps of Shackleton. I consider them inventors of knowledge schemes. It is the methodological process. The painting procedure deals with the preparation of the supports; I work with the smoke, everything comes from that. It is an archaic material, a residue, which allows to detect the slightest signals and beats, because painting generates from there.



My paintings are smoke cured panels that record the beats of the collectivity. It sounds quite pretentious of me. The fragility of my support corresponds to the fragility of the viewers, because it highlights a distressing moment of their existence. As a critic and friend of mine says, every work generates its most appropriate audience. Negotiation is planned there. Moreover, we should consider that in my work process, the contact with the people is very important, because it occurs always in moments of affective exception. Without such involvement, without this engagement, artworks would never exist.”

More than in the visual result of the work, Prats is interested in the internal processes of its realization; more than the aesthetic pleasure, he tries to create a powerful experience; more than success and comfort, he keeps pursuing risk and utopia. Also, the particular reality of a seismic, extensive, mountainous, etc., country, exacerbates above all the differences, which appear to be even more dramatic when catastrophes strike and countries cannot draw upon the same resources to cope with them.

On 16th March 2011, Prats sailed off on the crossing from Punta Arenas to the South Pole. Aboard, the Navy icebreaker “Almirante Viel”, the admiral Jorge Montenegro was in charge of the crew of 105 members to put through the project of Prats, entitled Gran Sur, reaching its destination: Elephant Island, the same point where, in 1914, the Shackleton’s expedition became trapped in the ice. They didn’t run less risks. The same experience of the Irish explorer served as an antecedent. The explorer wanted to cross the Antarctic continent, but his ship was trapped fast in the ice pack, leaving the crew stranded on the ice floes for more than one year, until when, in 1916, the Chilean pilot Luís Pardo rescued the stranded crewmen in a heroic exploit. South Pole has always been risky. “The expedition carried out with Prats had a military rigour and discipline –

said the admiral leading the expedition. Elephant Island is an inhospitable mountainous island with few accesses to the sea, indeed this is the first time that our ship gets there. The climatic conditions of wind and sea are tough, there are giant waves, and fog deepens as wind speed increases.”



“Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honour and recognition in case of success”: written in neon lettering, the advert attempted to relate the entrance to the Pavilion with the snow-covered and inhabited territory of the South Pole, through an original dialogue (Shackleton published this advert on the London newspapers in 1900, when he was organizing the National Antarctic Expedition, calling for men for his mission). So, the artistic portrait of a nation is assembled, whose dramatic force, the lack of bashfulness and the post-apocalyptic and epic mood, were a sensation among the general as well as the specialized audience. Viewers had the feeling of being in front of a lonely Romantic artist, who goes back to his native land to trace its soil and history, as if in a sort of cult and mystification of the man/artist/explorer. An advert with ethic connotations, which highlights how the human being manages to survive in extreme environments. It is eventually related to the conditions that characterize Chile through its catastrophes.

Prats ends our conversation saying: “In short, it is a statement on the limits of the art. Ultimately, on the limits of human resistance. Art constantly places you in this zone of resistance, and in Venice it has an amplified reverberation. Nonetheless, the central element of this choice is the ethic attitude of Shackleton in the Antarctic.”

Antonio Arévalo

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