



JULIÃO SARMENTO

Museu Serralves, Porto

'White Nights' is Julião Sarmento's most comprehensive retrospective to date. This major survey comprises more than 160 works – including drawing, painting, performance, photography, sculpture and video – and spans his 40-year career. It successfully sets out to highlight the Portuguese artist's exploration of the domestic sphere; works were grouped around representations of the home and of architecture.

The museum's interior structure is used to highlight the works' relation to space: 'Seven Houses and Six Flats' (2006), a set of photographs and architectural plans of the houses in which Sarmento used to live, is presented in two groups. The series is divided by the doorway of the room showing *R.O.C. (40 Plus One)* (2011), a video of a woman undressing as she recites extracts from Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'Remarks on Colour' (notes he wrote in the last months of his life, in 1951). The intimate information about the artist's life in 'Seven Houses and Six Flats', revealing the inside structure and the outside features of his most private spaces, is echoed by the model's nudity in the video. The two short 8mm films, *Shadow and Faces* (both 1976), that flank *R.O.C. (40 Plus One)*, further develop a sense of voyeurism. The films reveal brief glimpses of naked female bodies obscured by shadows, extreme close-ups and the texture of the footage; this erotic game of hide and seek is magnified by the hut-like constructions in which they are installed that allow the visitor to see the images from the outside.

In her essay 'Cut! Reproduction and Recombination' (2012), Hito Steyerl analyzes the ways in which cinema reconfigures the human form; bodies are

fragmented and reorganized by the cinematic frame. Sarmento's work relates to this cinematic device in the sense that the highly sexualized female bodies that inhabit his universe are often mutilated – in his large white canvases of the 1990s, such as *A Seemingly Innocuous Dialogue* or the life-size fibreglass and resin sculptures such as *Licking the Milk Off Her Finger* (both 1998), in which the faces are left empty, erased or cut. In the sculpture *A Human Form in a Deadly Mould* (1999), another faceless life-size female figure wearing a black summer dress bends forward with a rope around her neck, balancing herself against a wall. Voyeurism here is clearly highlighted, its repressive violence enacted.

The analogue slide-show and sound installation *Coge* (1975–6), created after a performance inside a tiger's cage at the Lisbon Zoo, is a further example of Sarmento's interest in the power-play of the gaze. The installation documents the animal's point-of-view; the observer becomes the observed. The proliferation of different gazes (the artist, the visitor, the objects looked at) echo the instability of desire and of its representations. In the show's title piece, the large-scale drawing *White Nights* (1982), a central image of two female figures touching each other is combined with smaller unfinished and abstract drawings. It's a representation that hints at the fleeting presence of desire and at the impossibility of ever fully portraying it.

JOÃO LAIA

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Julião Sarmento, 'White Nights'
2012, installation view

JULIÃO SARMENTO

LA CASA ENCENDIDA - MADRID



The solo exhibition by Portuguese artist Julião Sarmento at La Casa Encendida in Madrid can be described as a triangle pointing upwards. All the cultural center's spaces have been dedicated to the artist: from the terrace (the top of the triangle) to the basement spaces (its base), passing through the halls on the first floor. Paintings, sculptures, installations, films and performances seem to be continuously triangulating through these well-designed

spaces. But we could also read the triangle as if the artist and the curator, Adrian Searle, were located at the upper vertex, the spectator at one of the two bottom vertices and the female bodies that figure in most of the works, at the third. The works in the middle would then be moving closer or further from each of these vertices, producing at times an uncomfortable proximity and, at other times, a disembodied contemplation.

The title of the show, "Distancia cortas / Close distance," unquestionably refers to the physical nearness that characterizes both the artist's subjects: the overlapping and therefore ambiguous black silhouettes extracted from pornographic magazines in the pictorial series "Pornstars"; and the body of the spectator, as in the film *Close* (2000-01), a collaboration with filmmaker Atom Egoyan in which the size of the screen and the narrow space in front of it makes it impossible to clearly appreciate the image.

Desire, eroticism, pleasure, but also voyeurism, discomfort and spectatorship seem to be at the heart of the triangle. In relation to the ubiquitous presence of females, Sarmento

has stated, "Women are a leitmotiv for me. To start working I need a pretext and I find it in the representation of the female body." Not by coincidence, if we were now to reverse the triangle that represents this show so that it was pointing down, we would obtain a very recognizable feminine symbol.

Emma Brasó



Above: JULIÃO SARMENTO, Film Noir (with carpet) (genérico 21), 2007. Fibreglass, resin, fabric, velvet, persian carpet, wood, spotlights, 170 x 390 x 277 cm. Courtesy the artist and Pedro Oliveira, Porto. Left: JULIÃO SARMENTO, Jolie Valse, 2007. Video, color, sound. Courtesy Joan Prats, Barcelona.

JULIÃO SARMENTO



& JOÃO LUÍS CARRILHO DA GRAÇA



TXT:
DAVID BARRO
IMG:
ÁLVARO NEGRO

Tras una pausada visita a su estudio, DARDO convoca una reunión en la casa de Julião Sarmento con cuatro nombres clave de la cultura en Portugal: el arquitecto João Luís Carrilho da Graça, la modelo Ana Isabel, la periodista y escritora Clara Ferreira Alves y el propio Julião Sarmento. A todos nos une una relación de amistad con nuestro anfitrión, referencia indudable del arte contemporáneo internacional. Una conversación que se ve salpicada de encuentros: la llegada de Isabel, la mujer de Julião, de su hija, el artista Álvaro Negro tomando fotografías, la presencia permanente del perro, etc.

DB / Me pareció una buena idea reunirnos en una casa después de pensar en cómo Jacques Derrida definió la arquitectura como una construcción habitada, "una herencia que nos atañe antes de haber intentado reflexionar sobre ella". Pensé entonces en el título de una de las obras de Julião –"Una casa para vivir en ella"– y recordé que Julião estudió arquitectura durante un tiempo, en la década de los sesenta. Creo que no hay mejor punto de partida que comenzar por el principio, por ese punto previo que siempre exige una reflexión abierta, como aquella cabaña primitiva dibujada en la portada del libro de Laugier *Essai sur l'architecture*, que es casi igual que un bosque natural. En ocasiones, cuando me detengo ante algún edificio singular, pienso en cuál debe ser la primera reflexión de un arquitecto antes de proyectar o construir y qué distinta debe ser respecto a la de un artista, y también la de un artista cuando colabora con un arquitecto.

JLCG / Cuando comienzo un proyecto siempre intento comprender la situación en la que se encuadra. Me pregunto qué es lo que quieren esas personas y cómo es ese lugar también desde un punto de vista geográfico; cómo es que el sol gira alrededor de esa casa y del sitio donde se va a construir, y cómo se puede establecer un sistema que constituya una especie de abrigo para la vida de esas personas. Es algo tan simple como esto.

JS / La mirada del arquitecto sobre la arquitectura y sobre aquello que es arquitectura es completamente diferente a la mirada que un artista visual tiene sobre aquello que es su propio trabajo. En la arquitectura existe un lado funcional que no existe en el arte.

JLCG / Aunque puede haberlo...

JS / Pero debe ser una funcionalidad diferente. El arte protege únicamente el espíritu y la arquitectura no sólo protege el espíritu sino también el cuerpo.

JLCG / Creo que fundamentalmente son convenciones que la sociedad asume y que nosotros asumimos casi sin querer como punto de partida. Efectivamente, la arquitectura es muy diferente al arte y tiene ese objetivo relativamente práctico. Eso se torna más evidente cuando comparamos la arquitectura y el diseño; aunque el diseño pueda llegar a tener un propósito social generoso siempre debe ser guiado por un objetivo práctico, como la arquitectura. Habitualmente partimos con esa premisa de que la arquitectura es una actividad de enorme pragmatismo, obligada a resolver problemas y que solo funcione en ese registro.

JS / Pero yo no digo que sólo funciona en ese registro...

JLCG / Pero la sociedad sí asume que es así. En cambio, los artistas tenéis una especie de misión que os permite funcionar en un área mucho más amplia y con menos responsabilidades inmediatas, por lo menos aparentemente.

JS / Estoy de acuerdo en ese aspecto, pero no creo que sea únicamente una convención, ya que la mayor parte de las convenciones existen porque hay reacciones para que ellas existan. La arquitectura es algo a lo que te unes, es una ne-

cesidad fundamental. De ahí que, respecto a lo que comentaba David de cómo los artistas funcionan con un arquitecto, creo que hay especificidades para cada uno de los proyectos y para cada circunstancia. Por ejemplo, el último encargo que nos han hecho para que colaboremos en un proyecto consistía en hacer un film sobre una casa realizada por João Luis, con la casa como protagonista, una casa que ya existe. Podría ser una ficción, un documental, o lo que sea, pero el proyecto es sencillo, porque siempre resulta más fácil cuando otro toma la iniciativa, porque partes de una serie de límites. En todo caso, pienso que cuando hay colaboraciones entre un artista y un arquitecto el artista se deja "subyugar" por la voluntad del arquitecto, por principio. A todos los efectos, el arte nunca tendrá una función tan específicamente decorativa –en el buen sentido de la palabra– como en estos casos; o en otras palabras, rara vez acompañará a un sujeto tan po-



deroso como la arquitectura. A mi entender, en este tipo colaboraciones el artista debe actuar en función de la arquitectura que quiere homenajear, aunque hay casos en los que puede ser diferente, como sucede en otro proyecto que tenemos que recupera un cuadro mío realizado para el retablo de una capilla en Sintra; ahora queremos recuperar ese cuadro para ponerlo dentro de una capilla en Aveiro y el proceso es el inverso porque João Luis está haciendo lo contrario, partir del cuadro para hacer su propia arquitectura.

JLCG / Pero la circunstancia de ese proyecto es particular, porque el cuadro en sí mismo había partido de la arquitectura de aquella capilla en Sintra y constituía una especie de reflejo de sus elementos decorativos. Ahora será expuesto en una capilla diferente para la cual fue pensado y por eso entendí que sería interesante proyectar una especie de reflexión del cuadro capaz de reproducir, en cierta medida, la situación original.



Julião Sarmento

Sean Kelly Gallery

Julião Sarmento's exhibition "Some Limits of Reason"—consisting of nine new mixed-

media paintings and three installations—explores once again the artist's trademark imagery: a sexy, headless mannequin-like woman clothed in a strapless black dress, naked or in a short black skirt, appears sitting, standing, or kneeling over antique chairs and tables.

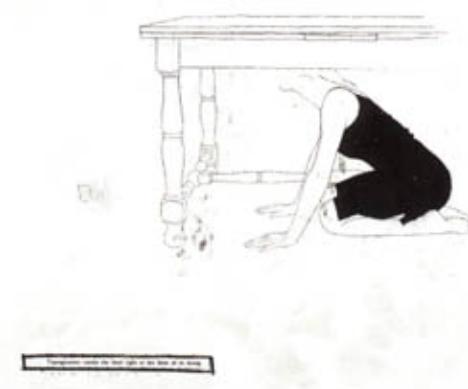
The installations are made of life-sized sculptures of female figures cast in resin and fiberglass, and readymade pieces of furniture. In them, the headless female mannequin crouches naked under a table, leans over a table wearing her black dress, or stands among rows of old chairs. The installations maintain a close dialogue with the black and white paintings, which also depict the incomplete female figure among tables and chairs. Sarmento applies white paint unevenly on the surface of the canvases, drawing and painting in mixed media the women's silhouette and the furniture. He effaces and erases parts of the black outlines, leaving their smudged marks on the surface of the canvases, and offers the viewer the sense of an unfinished painting, like a work in progress. The erased lines also recall the idea of marks, fragments, memories, and traces that evoke a limit to be crossed or a boundary to be transposed or transgressed. And transgression is exactly the recurrent subject of Sarmento's work.

Sarmento's new works suggest sexuality, transgression, desire, eroticism, and mystery. In these latest paintings, image and text are intertwined, emphasizing the veiling and unveiling of the mystery around this

The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever they may be, they possess a limit could not exist if it were absolutely...
absolutely, since, reciprocally, transgression would be possible if it...
merely crossed a limit composed of distances and shadows.

milk and honey

Maria Pires



Transgression consists in the limit of the limit of the shadow.

Julião Sarmento. *Milk and Honey*, 2004. Mixed media on canvas.
74 7/8 x 86 5/8 x 2 3/8 in (190 x 220 x 6 cm).

lonely, sexy female figure lying among the pieces of furniture. The fragmentary text silk-screened on the canvases is from a posthumously published essay by Michel Foucault on Georges Bataille. It explores Bataille's ideas on sexuality and transgression. Parts of the text are also erased and most of it is outlined and carries the reader's notes, like a book that has been carefully read. The titles are inscribed in the paintings and they are also sexual in nature, for example: *Kiss me, Kiss my eyes, Milk and honey, Behind your eyelids, and I love you.*

Sarmento was born in Lisbon in 1948 and has exhibited extensively worldwide. In these works his fascination with the territory of desire is explored through the suggestion of transgressed boundaries; the necessity of surpassing limits; or the idea that lines exist to be crossed. Sarmento quotes Foucault one of his paintings entitled *Milk and Honey* (2004): "... a limit could not exist if it was absolutely uncrossable, and reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows." In that painting, a faceless sensuous woman wearing a black dress is crouching under a table. In an installation entitled *Milk and Honey (under the table)* (2004), a naked, headless, mannequin-like woman, made of cast resin and fiberglass, also crouches under a wooden table. Over the table, there are two half-filled glasses—one with milk and the other one with honey. Like the wooden table, all the pieces of furniture in this exhibition originally belonged to the artist's grandmother and have emotional associations for him. Sarmento never fully completes the figures or silhouettes of these women and they usually convey a feeling of longing, loneliness, and unfulfilled desire. In his works there is always a line to be crossed between explicit aggressive sexuality and implicit erotic sensuality and it is open to the viewer to decide how much the artist knew and loved these women, or how much he despised and hated them and treated them merely as images of his erotic fantasies. There is definitely a feeling of voyeurism and fetishism underlying Sarmento's pieces, given that the women appear to be inaccessible and untouchable objects of love and desire. His work can be seen as violent sublimated at-

tempts against these women, or simply as poetic evocations of love for the women in his life. The obsessive, inexplicit, ambiguous, and sometimes disturbing suggestions evoked by the work are also the source of its strength. As Sarmento quotes from Foucault, "Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being." It becomes almost tautological to read these images under Foucault's analysis of Bataille's ideas on sexuality and transgression.

Whether these ambiguous, suggestive images of painted and sculpted, naked or clothed, headless female figures crouching under the table or leaning over chairs come from an aggressive misogynist imagination or are beloved symbols of general and unspecific desire remains an open question.

Claudia Calirman