

Monday, June 6th, 2016

Heartbeats: The Spanish Rhythms of Juan Uslé

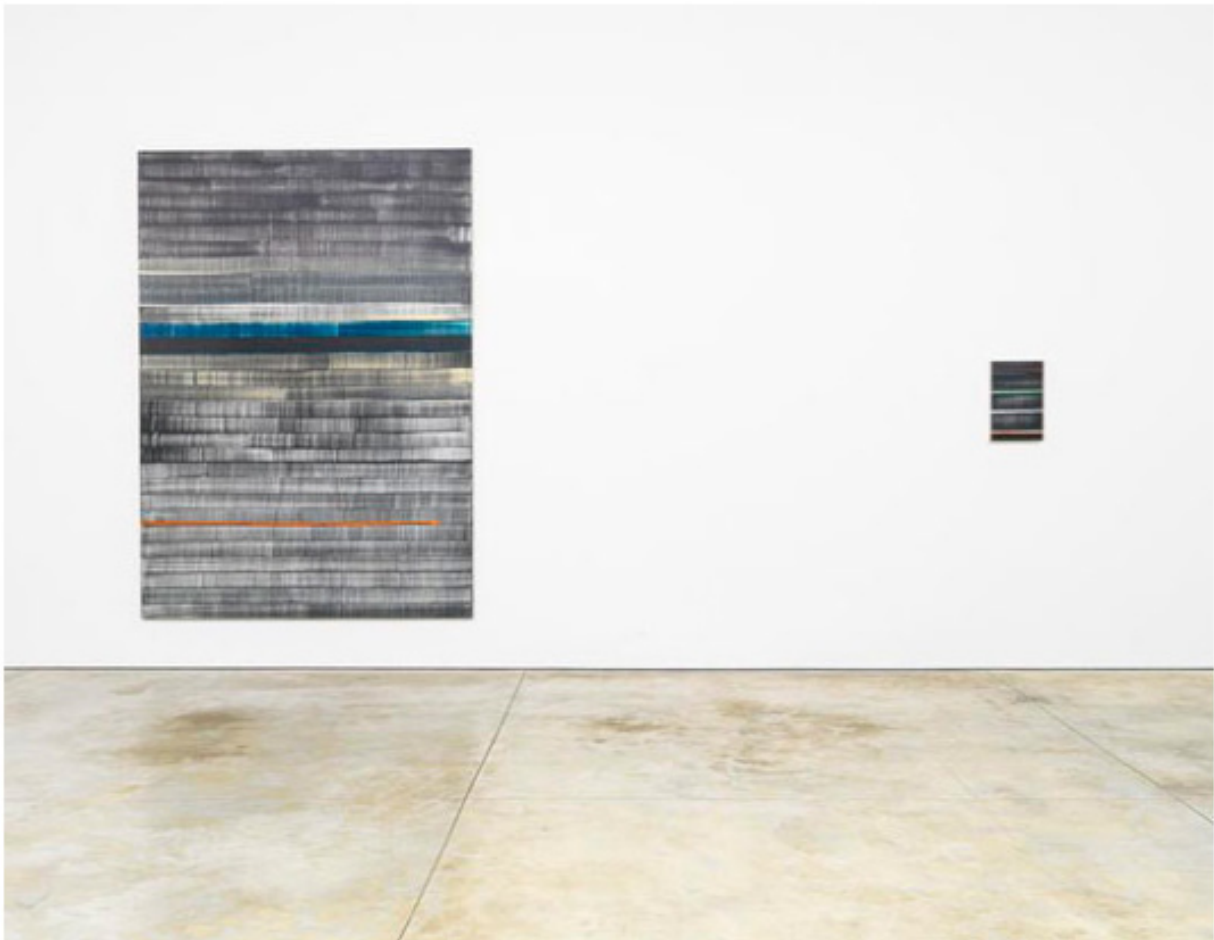
by David Rhodes

Juan Uslé: Membrana Porosa at Cheim & Read

May 5 to June 18, 2016

547 W. 25th Street (between 10th and 11th avenues)

New York, 212 242 7727



Installation view of "Juan Uslé: Membrana Porosa," 2016, at Cheim & Read. Courtesy of the gallery.

Spanish painter Juan Uslé's recent work, now on view at Cheim & Read, bears an inseparable connection with environmental conditions experienced out of doors, and out of an urban scape, perhaps. That low, raking illumination at dusk, the change physically in our receptiveness to color and tonal contrasts when surrounded by fading light in the transition from day to night, are all more intense, slower, and more subtle away from the noise and artificial illumination of the city. I say "perhaps" because in the city there is that incredible moment when fading natural light combines with electric light. All of this, it seems, both informs and is contained in, these new canvases.



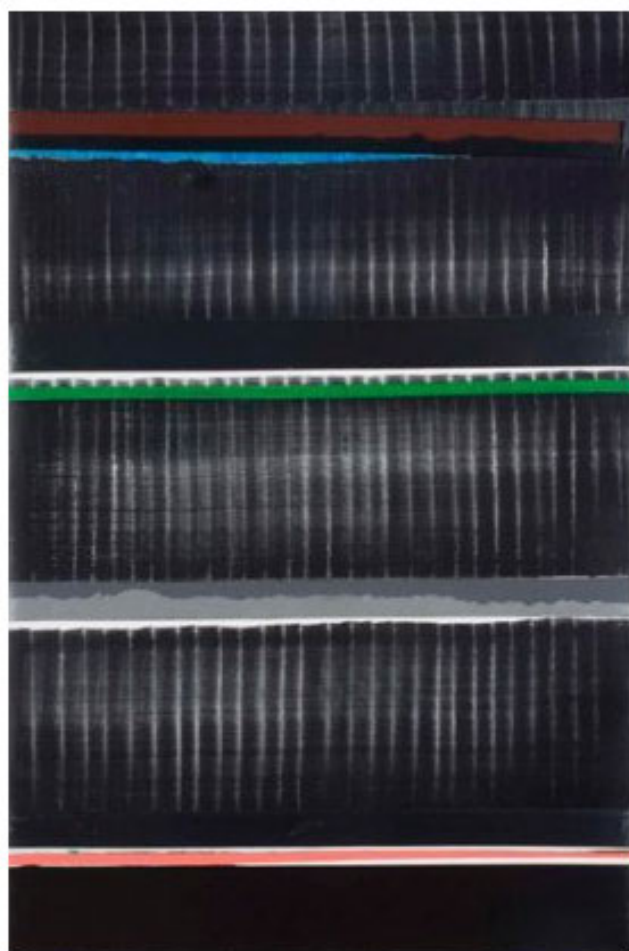
Juan Uslé, *SOÑE QUE REVELABAS (COLORADO)*, 2016. Vinyl, dispersion and dry pigment on canvas, 120 x 89 inches.

Courtesy of the artist and Cheim & Read.

There are only three sizes of canvas present, *SOÑE QUE REVELABAS (COLORADO)* (2016) is an example of a series of paintings begun in 1997 and is rendered in the largest size. The other paintings are considerably smaller, at 24 by 18 inches and 18 by 12 inches, respectively, and also belong to longstanding series in their own right. The earlier paintings often comprised vertical as well as horizontal brush marks that moved and stopped, moved and stopped, sequentially, to the rhythm of the artist's heartbeat. These paintings, when made in New York are frequently made at night when the city is somewhat quieter, and the heartbeat can be felt in the silence, varying as it does, sometimes faster, sometimes slower, over time. At 120 by 89 inches, the field of this painting visibly absorbs light and reflects it at different intervals. The light reflected is modified by the paint that covers a prepped gessoed surface in uneven — fluid, abrupt or staggered — rhythms. The gradations recall the restless, wrist-driven, backgrounds of Goya's *Los caprichos* (1797–1798) or the apparently black surroundings of Velázquez's *Cristo Crucificado* (1632). The Velázquez is 98 by 67 inches, a large painting that presents an image of Christ on the cross in an isolated and classical contrapposto posture.

The apparently black surroundings, or ground, of the figure are not actually black but a kind of unfathomable green black consisting of a multitude of brush strokes that accumulate and with their different directions pulse and variegate the light that falls onto the painted surface. It is a surface alive with the repetitions of Velázquez's hand in motion in a way like the stepped movement of Uslé's hand as it tracks across a painting.

In Kayak (Aral 11) (2015), like the other small paintings here, demands its share of wall space. In regarding the space afforded between paintings in the installation, it comes as no surprise that the smaller works require as much wall space as large works. *In Kayak* shares the horizontal repetitions, each one above the next, of *SONE QUE REVELABAS (COLARADO)*. However, the change in scale takes us closer to the painting in a different way, the view now close, like a person is close to the water in an actual kayak, something Uslé experiences regularly. Between each band of black horizontal translucent brush strokes that deposit the pigment loaded into a medium of vinyl at intervals, like silt, are lines of opaque paint of various colors. The final, bottom passage, though, is not, as might be expected, more translucent paint, but instead another band, this time of opaque black. One's eyes have to adjust as if to perceive a shadow or afterimage. This increases the complexity of this painting in denying expectation, both in beauty and structure, exponentially.



Juan Uslé, *IN KAYAK (ARAL 11)*, 2015. Vinyl, dispersion and dry pigment on canvas, 18 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Cheim & Read.

In part three of George Kubler's book *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962), titled "The Propagation of Things," Kubler writes:

The occurrence of things is governed by our changing attitude to the process of invention, repetition, and discard. Without invention there would be only stale routine. Without copying there would never be enough of any man-made thing, and without waste or discard too many things would outlast their usefulness. Our attitudes towards these processes are themselves in constant change, so that we confront the double difficulty of charting changes in things, together with tracing the change in ideas about change.

He goes on to state that a condition of the present is the acceptance of continual change. It is this that Uslé's paintings embody, even celebrate, successfully, neither avoiding repetition nor denying difference. All the paintings in this exhibition are part of larger series, and each painting is assertively particular despite, or one could say because of sharing a continuity of formal elements.

HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES • WEEKEND

Juan Uslé's Brushstrokes

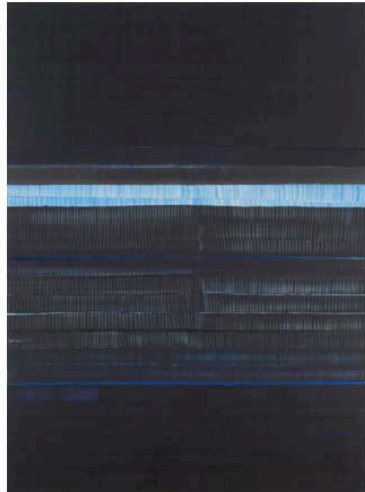
by John Yau on May 29, 2016



Juan Uslé, "SOÑE QUE REVELABAS (COLORADO)" (2016), vinyl, dispersion and dry pigment on canvas, 120 x 89 inches (all images courtesy Cheim & Read)

When I asked Juan Uslé about a particular brushstroke, in an interview that I did for the [Brooklyn Rail](#) in April 2011, this is what he said:

I think you're referring to the brushstrokes arranged in sequence, like large rulers, which at once occupy and construct the space of the black (dark) paintings that I call "Soñé que Revelabas" ("I Dreamed That You Revealed"). Yes, they are discontinuous brushstrokes produced by intermittent contact: I move the brush and press down until the next heartbeat occurs. I try to follow a sequential rhythm, marked by the beating of my pulse, and that's why I almost always work on these paintings at night, especially here in New York, because it takes concentration and silence in order to feel it.



Juan Uslé, "SOÑE QUE REVELABAS (MACKENZIE)" (2015), vinyl, dispersion, acrylic and dry pigment on canvas, 108 x 80 inches (click to enlarge)

In his current exhibition, *Membrana Porosa*, at Cheim and Read (May 5 – June 18, 2016), the artist's first in New York since 2011, Uslé shows fourteen paintings in the gallery's four distinct spaces.

The eight large paintings are from the ongoing series, "Soñé que Revelabas" ("I Dreamed That You Revealed"), which he started in 1997, along with the six modestly scaled paintings, none which are part of the series. The large paintings are over nine feet by seven feet, while the modestly scaled paintings go from eighteen by twelve inches to twenty-four by eighteen inches. Despite the difference in size, both groups of paintings can be seen from a distance and from close-up: they are open to different kinds of looking, largely because they are all

developed out of the repeated application of an individual brushstroke.

This is what Uslé said about his motivations for making this brushstroke:

I think that I begin these paintings looking for silence. And the mechanism, this form of making them, speaks to me from pure necessity. I feel a necessity to make these paintings, as if it were a ritual, the reciting of a prayer: fusing calm and action, trying not to think, listening to my body. Making them is like filling the world with silence, from the void, in order also to signify at least one sufficiently large, generous space, chosen for that purpose. It's like a cleansing exercise, to seek emptiness, guided by a biological reference point. Perhaps I make them because we see too impurely, and we are sometimes tormented by images. We are so overloaded with images that we breathe, we live more and more inside a neural Times Square.



Juan Uslé, "FRÍO DENTRO" (2015-16), vinyl, dispersion and dry pigment on canvas, 24 x 18 inches (click to enlarge)

I went back to this interview that Uslé and I did five years ago because it occurred to me that the "Soñé que Revelabas" paintings share something with the moodiness of Mark Rothko's great works of the 1950s as well as with Roman Opalka's horizontal striations of numbers. Although Uslé belongs to a younger, postmodern generation as opposed to these venerated modernist masters, he too wanted to make what Rothko called a "naked painting," something basic and irreducible.

Uslé arrived at his "cleansing exercise" through a small, striated brushstroke, which he made by pressing against the canvas as he moved horizontally across the surface, from one side to the other, making row after

row. Here is where Opalka comes in. For both Opalka and Uslé, the act of painting becomes a form of meditation. In the wake of Minimalism, Uslé's ability to make an ongoing series of reductive paintings that do not suffer by comparison with the work of artists such as Brice Marden, Robert Ryman and Frank Stella is something to celebrate. Moreover, for all the moodiness of Uslé's magentas, grays, blues and blacks, he often finds a way to incorporate or introduce a whimsical or seemingly irrational element into his work.

Here, I wonder if he is not inadvertently criticizing Mark Rothko who seems – at least in the public press – not to have gotten any pleasure out of making his floating clouds of color. The interruptions that are embedded within many of the paintings of "Soñé que Revelabas" underscore that things don't add up, that contradictions are synonymous with everyday life. On one hand, the surfaces of Uslé's paintings registers his movement, his heartbeat; they are like electrocardiograms run through with rips and tears. On the other hand, something unpredictable impacts the measured movement of brushstrokes. It might be a change in color from one row to the next, or a tonal shift where one striated brushstroke is darker or lighter than the one preceding it. Meanwhile the light emanating from the brushstrokes is filmic and, at times, crepuscular.

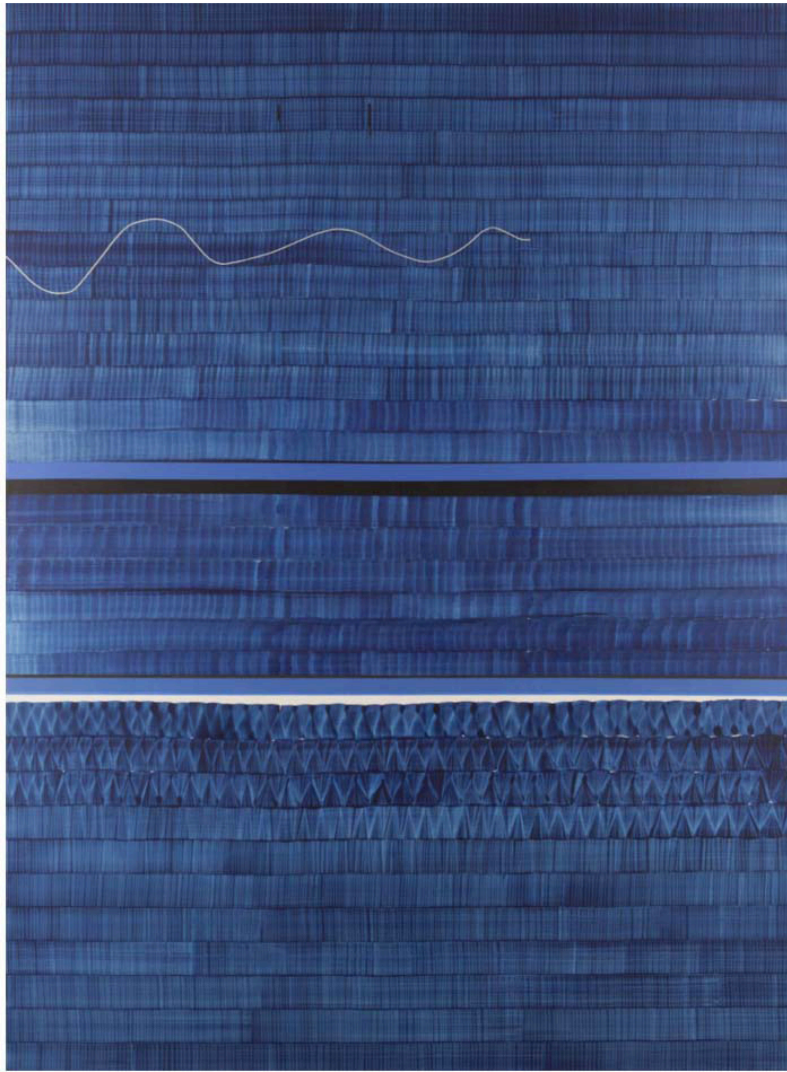


Juan Uslé, "SÕNE QUE REVELABAS (GANGES)" (2016), vinyl, dispersion and dry pigment on canvas, 108 x 80 inches (click to enlarge)

In "Soñé que revelabas (Columbia)" (2015), a red linear element runs from left to right between two lower rows; it does not span the painting's width. In "Soñé que revelabas (Ganges)" (2016), Uslé divides the painting into three horizontal sections. The upper part is made of magenta brushstrokes, with two narrow blue linear elements lodged between the rows of brushstrokes, like evening light slipping through the crevice. While the lower section is made of dark gray brushstrokes, the middle section is solid black, divided midway by a severe, vertical white band, which also runs along the bottom of the section, spanning the painting like the lip of a windowsill.

To the left of the vertical white line, Uslé has painted a blue band whose top and bottom

edges are angled in. A different colored blue line is abutted against the top edge of the thin, horizontal white line running along the bottom of the solid black section. Together, the white and blue lines dividing the black section hint at dimensionality, making the solid black into an impenetrable space. Is this blackness – at once immediate and unknowable – what the "you" (or the painting) revealed to Uslé in a dream? In the largely blue "Soñé que revelabas (Danubio)" (2016), a white line undulates in from the upper left side of the painting, like a snake or thread. It gives the painting an unexpected jolt, and causes us as well to closely scrutinize the painting.



Juan Uslé, "SOÑE QUE REVELABAS (DANUBIO)" (2016), vinyl, dispersion and dry pigment on canvas, 120 x 89 inches

In two of the modestly scaled paintings – "El jardín cerrado" and "Frío dentro" (both 2016) – Uslé has introduced a new brushstroke. It is a striated fan-like shape, which he repeats in an interlocking pattern across the painting's surface. The striations evoke the accretions of a seashell, which this brushstroke resembles. Using vinyl, dispersion, and dry pigment, Uslé is able to get a brushstroke that is ghostly, seemingly made of filmic light. Materially speaking, Uslé's paintings bear no resemblance to Rothko's or Opalka's. If everything has been done in painting, as some have claimed, it is apparent to me that not everything has been done with paint.

I become conscious of the individual brushstrokes – feathery striations within a membrane-like presence. I slow down my pace, examine the brushstrokes as if I were a lepidopterist looking at the glowing, powdery wings of a particularly rare specimen. For a few moments, I even forget the world, its constant collisions and bombardments, and return to myself. In a world of distractions, Uslé's paintings stand out.

[Membrana Porosa](#) continues at Cheim and Read (547 West 25th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through June 18.

Juan Uslé Abstracción
con lógica geométrica y
elementos orgánicos

Lógica, misterio y matiz

Juan Uslé
Landropo
y Zebulon

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NOËLIA HERNÁNDEZ

En el esquivo terreno de la abstracción geométrica –a menudo considerada como un arte frío, sistemático y con un alto grado de independencia respecto a las referencias visuales del mundo que nos rodea– destaca el trabajo del pintor santanderino Juan Uslé (1954), por su manera de conciliar la lógica de la geometría con elementos de carácter más orgánico, en cuadros llenos de matices, dinamismo y misterio.

Uslé hace un tipo de abstracción que pone el acento en cuestiones perceptivas por encima del orden de la composición. Su trabajo es el reflejo de una personal manera de ordenar el universo, entendiendo la abstracción no sólo como una



Juan Uslé: 'Landropo', 2010-2011

cuestión formal sino también como un lenguaje que le permite explorar cuestiones subjetivas. Quienes no hayan podido ver alguna de las tres retrospectivas que se le han dedicado en los últimos años, ahora tienen una nueva oportunidad para descubrir su heterogéneo universo signico y cromático.

El chocante título escogido, *Landropo y Zebulón*, hace referencia a

la idea que Uslé defiende con respecto a la pintura. Son los nombres de los personajes de una fábula que está escribiendo y representan dos actitudes artísticas diferentes. Zebulón es un enamorado de la geometría que vive ensimismado en su taller trabajando lentamente en busca de buenos resultados, mientras que Landropo intenta robarle sus ideas para desarrollar las

en múltiples obras. También dan nombre a dos de las piezas que aquí se exponen, que sugieren una arquitectura tambaleante de siete pisos que se inclina hacia la izquierda, y un cuerpo tubular formado con la mezcla de muchos colores que se apoya sobre una base negra, respectivamente.

Aunque nos encontramos frente a obras abstractas, y por lo tanto abiertas, en ocasiones se produce un sutil acercamiento hacia formas figurativas que invitan a interpretaciones concretas más que razonables. Las pinturas resultan diferentes entre sí y forman parte de series independientes que Uslé ha desarrollado en los últimos años. *El discurso*, por ejemplo, pertenece a la serie *Soné que revelabas*, de formatos verticales y colores oscuros. Todo lo contrario de *Culebron Duchamp*, una obra de carácter más orgánico y colorido; *Solitaires*, por otra parte, posee un aspecto inacabado que le confiere un aire abstracto y abierto, mientras que *Desplazado* subraya la importancia del proceso creativo y conserva un pedazo de la cinta adhesiva que el artista empleó para planificarlo.

Su distribución en la galería responde a la voluntad de crear un diálogo entre lo rotundo y lo sinuoso, lo abstracto y lo interpretativo, lo organizado y lo caótico, y la luz y la oscuridad, alejándonos de cualquier tentativa de realizar una lectura cerrada. |

Juan Usle WITH JOHN YAU

This interview was conducted via e-mail in Spanish. It began after a series of conversations, in which Juan Usle and I decided that this would allow him to feel most at ease in language.

I would like to thank Rose Vekony, who translated my questions into Spanish as well as Usle's answers into English, including all citations of poetry that he made.

JOHN YAU (RAIL): I want to begin by asking you about a particular brushstroke that you make. You have said a number of times that you equate the time that you press the brush against the canvas to the time of your heartbeat. Could you tell me more about this?

JUAN USLE: I think you're referring to the brushstrokes arranged in sequence, like large rulers, which at once occupy and construct the space of the black (dark) paintings that I call "Soñé que Revelabas" ("I Dreamed That You Revealed"). Yes, they are discontinuous brushstrokes produced by intermittent contact: I move the brush and press down until the next heartbeat occurs. I try to follow a sequential rhythm, marked by the beating of my pulse, and that's why I almost always work on these paintings at night, especially here in New York, because it takes concentration and silence in order to feel it. The result varies from work to work and from day to day, depending on how calm or rapid my pulse is (blood is not always pumped at the same rate), and in general it turns into a sequential field or territory of marks and routes reminiscent of the sea, a landscape, or a pentagram. Perhaps it has something of a cardiogram as well, each stroke being systematic and mechanical but also organic, biologically or physically motivated: the echo of one's heartbeats, the pounding of waves on sand.

RAIL: It seems to me that with this particular brushstroke you feel your way across the surface. The painting or surface you are working on is open or blank when you begin with a small movement of the brush. This seems to me to be the opposite of what we think of as Abstract Expressionism, which we associate with impulsiveness and quickness of the body's movements. Why does the discontinuity of the brushstroke speak to you?

USLE: Yes, of course there is a relation, emotional as well as physical, an attitude and a work method that is quite different from that of pure action.

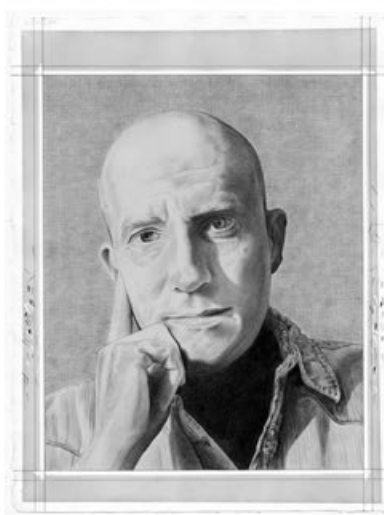
When John Cage visited the anechoic chamber at Harvard to listen to silence, he found that inside it two clearly differentiated sounds could be heard: one high-pitched, which was the sound of his nervous system, and the other low, the pumping of his blood.

RAIL: Yes, Cage realized that there was no such thing as silence. I am interested in this connection that you made to Cage. What do you mean?

USLE: I think that I begin these paintings looking for silence. And the mechanism, this form of making them, speaks to me from pure necessity. I feel a necessity to make these paintings, as if it were a ritual, the reciting of a prayer: fusing calm and action, trying not to think, listening to my body. Making them is like filling the world with silence, from the void, in order also to signify at least one sufficiently large, generous space, chosen for that purpose. It's like a cleansing exercise, to seek emptiness, guided by a biological reference point. Perhaps I make them because we see too impurely, and we are sometimes tormented by images. We are so overloaded with images that we breathe, we live more and more inside a neural Times Square.

RAIL: At the same time, the paintings with the discontinuous brushstroke exist within a body of work in which there is very little continuity in terms of style and motif.

The discontinuous brushstroke, especially when it is black and fills, or nearly fills, the painting fuses, as you say, calm and action. It breaks down a painting into a series of actions without any obvious direction.



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bul.

USLE: Before starting this group—the paintings that I've grouped under the general title "Soñé que Revelabas"—I made several medium-sized paintings in the early and mid '90s. These were characterized by an absolute absence of reference images on the pictorial level, but their syntax, their execution, was in itself generative of a unique space. Paintings such as "Amnesia," "Mojante (Wetting Agent)," or "Encerrados (Shut In)," though executed in an almost impersonal manner, were latent with the variation, the seismic shock generated by the simple action of extending the painting by sliding the brush over the canvas in a single gesture, the brushstroke going as far as the arm could reach. Between stops and starts, that encounter would produce a mark, a link that was generally sufficient to further this progressive construction of space. There's an element of prayer here, of being swept away. Also of fusion and emptiness, loss of the ego. Perhaps, ultimately, these were paintings executed through a rather anti-pictorial method, but I believe they are paintings.

RAIL: Okay, what about the paintings collectively titled "Soñé que Revelabas"?

USLE: I made the first "Soñé que Revelabas" painting in 1997 and didn't do the second one till the following year. In the beginning it was always like that; I was always trying to make the same painting, and I would make them only when I needed to. They arose in a completely atemporal manner, which is why I don't really consider them a series, but rather a family. I've done quite a lot of them now, and one day I'll try to look at them all together, but for now I just need to keep making them; they're still necessary for me, and it's exciting for me to see them grow. In the beginning I was trying to do the same thing each time: to press down and lift up—and keep going, with my pulse as the clock, the metronome, and nothing more. Now, in this process it's also become tempting for me to separate myself from them and observe them at a distance, and then they begin to suggest, to ask me to add something more,

and so I feel I'm close to the point where the pictorial conversation begins anew. With the passing years, and seeing pictures of some of these paintings together, I'm also aware of their differences, and how difficult it was to repeat a painting. Even following the same method, the same path and ritual, we find that the result is like us ourselves—we are not always the same.

RAIL: In a simple way one could divide your work into two groups, though there are overlaps and exceptions. One group is "Soñé que Revelabas," made up of discontinuous brushstrokes, while the other group has no title and uses color. The ruler-like brushstroke can appear in both groups, but is always found in the "black" paintings.

USLE: Shortly after I came to New York, someone—I think it was Kevin Power or Octavio Zaya—on seeing a new group of small works that I painted here, very materially present, but basically black, said of them that in New York, Juan has forgotten images.

RAIL: Had you forgotten images?

USLE: I was telling you earlier, that even in the '90s, submerged in the anti-stylistic attempt to make each new painting an experience and a syntactic reality completely different from the previous one, every once in a while a black sheep would crop up, a monochromatic painting that I logically took to be one more part of that Duchampian kalcidoscope in which I was working. At that time it was clear to me that the important thing was not to repeat myself, even to the extent that the works could not be recognized as being by the same artist—although, on the other hand, I had chosen a common format, identical for all of them. They formed a unit only by virtue of their identical format, but when I exhibited a group of them together it was always very difficult to make them cohabit, because their imaginary vocation was to be single: *Peintures Célibataires* (Unmarried Paintings).

That stylistic "difference" made me feel good, because I didn't want to become a slave to one way of doing things, one formula or style, and it rather bored me to think that my colleagues of the previous generation always did the same thing; they painted themselves. Although this, shall we say, realization—the sense of being liberated from a sterile manner of doing things—also had its downside in that people generally didn't get it. They didn't understand that a solo exhibition could be made up of such different works, though at least I had given all of them the same format. But in spite of these critical readings and opinions, I kept at it, since I had voluntarily chosen to abandon the formal idea of style. And that was therefore my style: to seek difference.

RAIL: So the poles in your work are sameness and difference.

USLE: When I later revisited my first "Soñé que Revelabas" paintings I clearly realized that I was now using the opposite strategy. I wasn't seeking difference now, but sameness. And so, standing in front of two or three of these paintings shown in a semi-retrospective around the year 2000, I thought, why not start a new project that would be based on this idea, that would investigate the idea and the possibilities of repetition? And here I am, following, from time to time, my previous steps, that ever-repeating pulse.

RAIL: Am I right in thinking that the "Soñé que Revelabas" paintings are among the largest ones you do?

USLÉ: The format of these dark paintings could, of course, be much larger. In the beginning I used the largest format that the dimensions of my studio here in New York would allow while still being able to get them out through the door. Sometimes, when I was in my studio in Saro (Spain), I thought about making them bigger, broadening the scale, but I finally decided to continue with the same format, thinking that that identity would help reinforce their meaning and intentionality.

RAIL: Given its history in art, why black?

USLÉ: I’ve always been attracted to the night, and I tend to feel very good in the studio when it’s quieter and the world is asleep. Even as a child, whether alone or with my brother, I would enjoy this “enormous” moment, this zone of time generated by and spreading with the sunset. I had the good fortune of growing up in the country and almost always being “free,” playing pranks out by the enclosed convent that we lived next to. My parents took care of the nuns’ cattle and worked their fields, and although we sometimes spoke with them through the service hatch or in the parlor, we almost never saw them. Well, sometimes we’d see them run or hide when we’d climb over the wall, using ropes. But generally we went about on our own, waiting for our parents to return from the day’s labor and have dinner, which would usually be quite late, after sundown. In the meantime, accompanied only by the song of some crickets, we’d sit around in the pasture gazing out at the river, that marvel of silvery, red reflections—and the murmuring water, the rise or fall of the tide.

RAIL: It sounds idyllic and in some sense remote, separate.

USLÉ: I’ve gone back there the past two summers, but now I go kayaking on the water; I usually travel upriver from the estuary to above the convent. I get out of my kayak as night falls, and once again I enjoy the great spectacle, the cooling moisture, the meanders, the silvery curves of the river, and I see myself sitting there like a small shadow in the distance, asking myself or my brother about the fate of that lost fisherman. Back then, amid those questions, the night was a mixture of magic, mystery, and fear.

RAIL: Repetition and difference has to do with one’s passage through time, doesn’t it?

USLÉ: Borges, in his magnificent story “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*,” masterfully convinces us of the impossibility of the copy. Thus, even as we read Pierre’s *Quixote*, supposedly written using the same words and identical punctuation, it is, he tells us, a different, original work. And perhaps that’s true, or at least we as well, over time, have conceptually redesigned both concepts: original and copy. I don’t purport to reach such a radical thesis, but my journey continues.

Sometimes I wonder how far I’ll go with “Soñé que Revelabas” and how many of these paintings will be necessary to complete the family. Once I determined a number, which I hid behind a wall of the studio where I paint, but I haven’t found it since. Many times I’ve imagined what it would be like to contemplate, in a large space, all (or many) of these paintings together. A very large space, of course, perhaps one that would also allow a circular tour. Or a spiral, but also guided by Borges’s image-idea in “The Library of Babel” that lets us read or, in my case, experience a painting, and continue the tour, the view, at a slower pace, so that when we want to go back to one of the ones we’d seen before, it’s impossible for us to find it, to recognize it.

RAIL: We have spoken about sameness (or repetition) and difference as recurring preoccupations. As you know, Heraclitus famously said, “You can’t step in the same river twice.” But, I would add, chances are it will still be a river when you stick your foot into it again. Why the interest in these two, seemingly opposite experiences? Is it philosophical?

USLÉ: Yes, it seems unlikely that a donkey would step twice in the same spot, but with us humans it happens all the time [*laughs*]. Heraclitus seems to me a very apt example also in terms of the mutability of matter: change, fire,

plasticity. But change and energy are mutually dependent and fuse together, and physics has persuaded us that everything, in some way, endures in the end. Thus we’re also talking about transformation and permanence. Instincts or preoccupations (sameness and difference) seem to me constant, even common, I would say, to the concept of “humanity,” and perhaps they still really are. I have always felt at once trapped and protected between the two poles, and I zigzag between them in my use of painting. And therein exists a dual interest, I would say—volitional and dependent—one doubtlessly philosophical and cultural, and the other visceral, vitalist, and empirical, both more or less genetic.

Before coming to New York in the late ’80s, I worked on an extensive series of paintings based on memories and experiences from my childhood, a series called *Río Cubas*. In order to produce it I had to move away from the place, gain a certain distance, a change of scene. Now, many years later, I revisit this river of my childhood from time to time, time and again, in painting. And I also revisit it in a kayak, which I use to travel, in the summer or autumn evenings, upstream beyond the place where I played as a child, returning downstream as night falls, weaving my way through the undulating threads of color that sinuously move toward me, as if they too are gliding on the surface laminated in calm. I don’t really know why I do it; perhaps it has to do with the saying, “The artist is born with the child who suffers.”

It would seem that on the one hand our life can be characterized as a constant striving to leave home (the secure, the known), while on the other it also seems possible that having swerved from the riskiest, most dangerous curve, we find ourselves caught in it once more.

RAIL: Let’s return to the collective title, “Soñé que Revelabas.” Doesn’t it also evoke photography, the image appearing out of the darkness?

USLÉ: Yes, it refers to dreams and darkness, sleep, and silence, but also to the darkroom (*el cuarto de revelar*) and magic—that magic moment filled with expectation, when the images begin to appear. Also to their disappearance and to the beating, the pumping of blood that we always feel in the moments prior to sleep, to repose, when the images disappear and are replaced by the flowing of fluids, their calm to and fro, in the darkroom or in our own bodies.

For years I had a small darkroom at home. I was a student, and that is where I developed not only the photos from which I made a living but also more experimental works. I was enchanted by that exciting moment when the images began to take shape and grow, and I often played with light, exposing them so that they would fade away, transforming into residual images, drifting from their own nature as in dream. I tried to take hold of them, to make them mine, but without fixing them in any way, trying to fuse and transform their idiosyncrasy, reflecting in them the transformational force of the fluids.

Thump, thump—that’s the rhythm, the sole strategy that produces these paintings, something akin to what Octavio Paz masterfully explains in his magnificent “Poem IV” in *The Poet’s Works*: the silence that resonates. In his own words: “The silence [that] is filled with sounds—I tell myself—and what you hear, you don’t really hear. You hear silence.”

I also find a photographic quality in these works; I often call them “Amnesiacs,” paintings without apparent images but that doubtless contain them: images and sounds. And they are also in some way images of painting, both after painting and from within it; commentaries and reflections on Malevich’s most recent painting, on the black painting and all black paintings, from Goya to Ad Reinhardt, Stella, and so on.

I have always felt a special fascination with very dark, or black, paintings—an ancestral attraction—even if they are not necessarily beautiful or explicit. A fascination of the sort that one sometimes feels for those people who have something special, something that compels you to watch and listen to them, whether in real life or on screen—people who seem simply to be themselves, but with that powerfully distinctive, indefinable, and hypnotic quality (not necessarily beauty).

RAIL: You have titled your forthcoming exhibition at Cheim and Read, *Desplazado (Out of Place)*. For it, you sent me an epigraph followed by a statement:

“I’ve had fun, worked hard, and discovered the world, but I’ve never felt the whole sense of a place. Maybe that is what I look for.” J.U.

I’ve always felt something strange, “displaced,” in the various places I’ve lived. When we would go to my grandparents’ town, I would watch the other children of my age and wonder: why do we—my family and me—not live there, too? Later, when I lived in the city, I’d get a similar feeling, and later still, as an adult, I’ve always stumbled from place to place. And even though I’ve had different studios in various places, that same feeling is always there—the feeling that we’re not completely from any specific place, or perhaps rather that we belong to all places at once.

I like and disdain New York. I always thought it was a “threshold,” open to many other places, situations, and possibilities. And over the years I’m still here for much of the time, continuing to feel the same anxiety, “displacement,” and mismatch that I have had since my childhood. This feeling is fundamental for my work. It nourishes it and keeps it hungry. It encourages me to be curious, to investigate new possibilities and territories, both in life and in the pictorial.

While your statement is autobiographical, I feel that it attains a degree of unexpected openness. After all, isn’t this feeling of displacement a recognition that one isn’t waiting for a catastrophe to happen, but that it has already happened with the Big Bang? Aren’t we born into its aftermath, continuation, and reoccurrence?

USLÉ: Two images from Pasolini’s film *Oedipus Rex* come to mind: the beginning, with the sequence of Oedipus’s birth; and the image, or rather the last line of the film, where Oedipus, now blind, says, “Life ends where it begins.”

You mention the Big Bang, and I think that birth as well, human and in general, might in some way be a cyclical explosion. In Spanish, “to give birth” is *dar a luz* (literally, to give or bring to light), which is how we might also represent the idea of creation. Indeed, I think that all birth implies not only fusion, effort, maturation, gestation, but also the notion of “friction,” as a result of abandoning the place of, let’s say, protection—the capsule or container that seemed safe and/or pleasurable (placentero): the womb, the placenta. *Placenta* is what we call the sac that breaks and expels at childbirth, together with the newborn, which it protects; and in painting is what we might call the transit, the creative trance. Perhaps birth, being born, is man’s first traumatic experience—the beginning of that likewise traumatic and sustained Rubicon that is the experience of living, so many times misguided, submitting to this tremendous stupidity that some gurus, and the powers that be, call the “search for happiness” or salvation. With no pretensions to transcendence or other grandiose notions, without speaking now about the universe or even the cosmos, the sensation of immensity and emptiness, the sense of abandonment that we often experience in the studio must not be too far from the friction and the actual experience of birth, of delivery. Birth and creation as a marvelous and traumatic experience—links perhaps, as you suggest, to the great explosion.

RAIL: In some way, one could say that in your paintings you register time as a passage of intense feelings, memories, and desires that you leave yourself open to, in order to endure, and experience. Is that one of the possibilities or states you seek in painting?

USLÉ: There’s something funny about all this. When we look at the history of painting, in some sense we’re also looking at the history of humanity. And if we consider the different phases and periods, the accidents and deaths, the demises that painting has gone through, we not only find that the old medium has always been there, but also, especially in the last 50 years, we vividly perceive in its scars the frenzy and acceleration with which we’ve been wringing out all the values and beliefs



Juan Uslé, “Solaris (Vacío)” (2010). Vinyl, dispersion, and dry pigment on canvas. 18 x 24 inches.

that supposedly held up our society, to the point of shattering them. We build up and tear down almost nonstop, since we are at once creators and oppressors. But what used to take centuries to mature to the point of breaking off and transforming into a new way of thinking, feeling, or living, now takes only one or two decades; in that short time almost everything—in art, painting, or habits and lifestyles—explodes, rots, or devours itself. Everything consumes itself, gobbles itself up at heart-stopping speeds. It gets to be absurd. We build cars, personal vehicles that can go up to 150, 180 miles an hour, attractively symbolizing the realization of our freedom and individuality; then these cars sell massively under that banner, so we end up having to limit the freeway speed to 65 or 70 mph. What sort of game are we playing? What is the basis of our society today, besides the market? The self-devouring zeal that this model of savage capitalism incites in us and subjects us to becomes a satirical oxymoron, something well conveyed in the image and concept of the stationary bicycle—these rows of stationary bicycles that I see through the windows when I walk by any of the 500,000 gyms in New York. That wheel-less bicycle that I climb on at home, in front of a screen, to supposedly “travel and sweat.” Are we now perfect hamsters pedaling away side by side, all lined up by the dozen? It’s an image straight from the best of Buñuel.

Painting fortunately has nothing to do with this image, nor, I think, with the one that Tom Wolfe sketched in *The Painted Word*, describing Fifth Avenue as a street packed with artists’ studios. Besides, we can’t see paintings in the gym, not even on a screen; it goes against their material nature, their substantiality.

RAIL: At the same time, I know that you are not nostalgic, and that you grew up in Spain and experienced daily life before and after the death of Franco. In some sense one goes back (or remembers), even though there is nothing to go back to.

USLÉ: No, I’m not disconnecting from my time or proposing a return to the caves, or to the 18th century, but I’m not going to swallow everything either. I’m not, for the sake of fashion or marketing, going to fall for the nonsense of denaturing, hollowing out a medium and its use, which, like music or poetry, helps us to feel and know ourselves, to understand and to enjoy—something that we choose because we need to do it from within ourselves, our interior, and not from the exterior marketing appeals to mask our ego with the latest model iPod.

Painting is an indispensable part, or area, of our natural and cultural park, an active genetic organism that travels with us in our becoming. And it’s a protagonist of “actuality” and of the future, in the same way that trees, so disastrously treated in certain parts of the planet (today is International Arbor Day), are for our parks and in our lives. Today we finally realize how necessary it is to breathe, as well as to contemplate.

I keep painting because it helps me to understand, to see things grow, with distance and intensity. I consider it a valid medium because, as someone between Italo Calvino and a Buddhist monk would say, painting unites “immediacy and duration” like no other medium.



Juan Uslé, “Solitaires” (2011). Vinyl, dispersion, and dry pigment on canvas. 24 x 18 inches.

RAIL: I have heard people speak of performance or video as a time-based medium, but they seldom speak about painting that way. Why do you think that is?

USLÉ: George Kubler, in his marvelous book *The Shape of Time*, wrote that “actuality...is the void between events.” Marshall McLuhan said that “the medium is the message,” and now, more than three decades later, it’s customary, in conversations relating to the pictorial medium, to ask ourselves: might there be any better temporal indication to act as a metaphor of this state of painting that continually plays at being referential and at heralding the deaths and resurrections of its own legacy? We live in a world that is stamped and classed by excessive consumption. Every month we’re induced to buy a new model of iPod, cell phone, or laptop, supposedly faster, lighter, and more powerful, so that we can supposedly enjoy more or communicate more rapidly with our friends and family, or perhaps also with our own emptiness. But it’s supposedly sexy to buy, as Warhol might have said.

I always get the impression that the more messages we send, or the more we “chat,” the less we say, and the more we fuel this form of disaster into which we’re turning the use and transmission of our energy and our time: supra-superficial communication. I’m not against the selective use of these media; their efficacy has been overwhelmingly demonstrated in such transcendent circumstances and events as the revolutionary sociopolitical changes that took place a few weeks ago in Tunisia and Egypt. The cell phone, too, proved a highly efficient instrument in the days between the terrorist attacks that took place in Madrid on March 11, 2003, and the general elections in Spain on March 14. There’s no doubt about that, but one cannot doubt the level of dependence that the supposed “free use” of certain addictive forms of communication generates, a new form of slavery. In the face of the excessive use of the *connect*, *inform*, and *delete* key, painting seems to speak to us from another interest, another place, another focus, and no doubt another time. Today we seem intent on quickly forgetting, and painting seems to tell us: “Stop right there; breathe and wait.” The image, too, grows, and is created from another time. And, if you wish, it can be forgotten as well, or you can abandon it—not, however, to save memory, but rather to construct a chosen imagery, because even though you forget it, it persists, it remains there.

RAIL: You believe the act of painting marks a different way of living in time. For one thing, it is a way for you to record your heartbeat.




Juan Uslé, “Ruedo Iberico” (2011). Vinyl, dispersion, and dry pigment on canvas. 24 x 18 inches.

USLÉ: I’m aware of the difficulty, or questioning, of painting as a valid medium in today’s world. It’s almost become a sumptuous, superseded concept. I think that painting today is another planet; we painters are relegated to another zone. The languages of contemporaneity, wrapped up in the frenetic pace of life, accord little importance to painting. Given this disjunction, one inevitably feels that the speed with which one lives in the studio doesn’t coincide with that of the street. Painting isn’t the most suitable medium for producing fast-paced images that devour themselves. It belongs to another “time,” in the sense not of an era but rather of speed, because it’s a slow medium.

I began “Contraposto” in 1992 and finished it in 1999. It’s so large that it’s hard to move, if you try to shift its position without someone’s help, because the paint drips. This accident highlighted something very important: the painting was taking on a certain pulse that I didn’t hear. I made sketches, trying to figure out a formal solution but never finding one. Years later came a second accident. I had an electrocardiogram, and I took the image of the lines home with me. When I enlarged them, I realized their association with the drips of painting, and I decided to operate, fusing them with the dripping accident.

“Delf Night” leads me to look to the past, and that coincides with looking inward, now that we are so obsessed with winning the race against time. The experience of painting not only implies complicity, it also demands that we be ready to enter into a perception of the “time” that no longer belongs to us. In the art world today, analysis has supplanted contemplation; the important thing is articulating languages that are more efficient and immediate.

There’s no allusion to anything religious in what I’m saying, nor am I just talking about how you always have to experience whatever it is you’re supposed to experience when you contemplate Rothko’s paintings. What I demand is a “place” that painting needs in order to manifest itself, and that requires a pure gaze, stripped of all preconceptions.

Creation almost always comes about in solitude. The painter is isolated, moving his hand, the brush, carrying out a gesture at once physical and mental. In the same way, it’s difficult to see the painting apart from this solitude—that nakedness of the gaze that I referred to. And that’s why night is important, and the darkened room in which the viewer finds himself totally surrounded by paintings, in absolute solitude, without clothes or flesh—completely naked. 

Juan Uslé

"Me gusta moverme entre fronteras"



Hacía diez años que la galería Joan Prats de Barcelona no exponía a **Juan Uslé** (Santander, 1954) y finalmente presenta una selección de su obra, realizada desde 2009 hasta hoy. Uslé, uno de los artistas actuales más internacionalmente reconocido, comparte la vida entre su estudio en Nueva York y un pueblecito cántabro, y en su exposición nos habla de la dualidad, de la inmediatez y la duración, a través de dos personajes, *Landropo* y *Zebulón*, protagonistas de un relato corto suyo, que dan título a la exposición. "Landropo y Zebulón son dos actitudes en pintura —explica Uslé— Landropo es un personaje dotado y sin escrúpulos, nacido y educado para llegar a lo más alto. Es reconocido como un pintor rompedor y revolucionario, pero es sobre todo egocéntrico y ambicioso. Zebulón, en cambio, ejemplariza una actitud más humilde, pero imprescindible: el aprendizaje como ejercicio permanente. Los dos son grandes artistas y llegan a coincidir, hacia 2050, en un edificio donde ambos tienen estudio. Comparten una pasión común por la pintura pero su aproximación y el entendimiento de la profesión es completamente distinto en ambos casos. Cada uno a su manera construye una red de influencias sobre el otro, que al final desemboca en una situación inesperada, tan cómica como posiblemente real. Hablar de Landropo y Zebulón es hacerlo de dos

tiempos innatos al proceso de la pintura, un modo de reivindicar como condiciones imprescindibles la inmediatez y la duración."

¿Hay antecedentes artísticos en su familia?

No sé, al menos yo no tengo noticia de antecedentes vinculados a las artes plásticas. Pero sí que ha habido fundidores, canteros y sobre todo, vaqueros. El "antecedente" que más me influenció fue sin duda mi padre; era una persona muy observadora y muy dotada para el dibujo. Recuerdo que siendo, mi hermano y yo muy pequeños, nos sentábamos por la noche cerca del fogón a deshojar panojas y él nos hablaba de historias de pájaros y animales, y de sus aventuras en África, donde hizo su servicio militar. Cuando le preguntábamos sobre algún pájaro solía dibujarlo de un trazo, sin dudar; representando su contorno sobre algún papel de envoltorio, estraza o periódico, que hacía las veces de mantel. Era increíble ver el lápiz de carpintero rojo desplazarse, o el tizón de leña tiznar sobre el pa-

pelón lo que al final sería la cresta o el plumaje distintivo de un pájaro.

¿Cómo llegó a la pintura?

Desde el dibujo. Casi todos los niños dibujan espontáneamente cuando son pequeños; es para ellos una forma natural de expresión y también un medio de conocimiento, que generalmente luego se abandona o arruina, bien por falta de inquietud, de pasión, o por ceguera o negligencia de los tutores. Yo tuve suerte, porque pronto en la escuela el maestro vio algo en mí y ciertos días me sentaba a dibujar aparte. Recuerdo un día en que me dio una caja alargada con unas barritas de color prensado dentro, acolchadas sobre algodones: *Goya* se llamaban. Y con ellas coloreábamos un mapa. Ese día estuve especialmente emocionado. Deslizar la barrita y frotar con el algodón sobre la superficie del papel, esparciendo como nubes de color aquel material tan vaporoso... ¡era como subir al cielo sin fumar!. Para colmo un día, meses después, el color y su magia, se transmutaron en sustancia. Volviendo de la escuela me encontré con un extraño artillugio frente a un grupo de casas en una barriada del pueblo, lo que resultó ser un pintor aficionado o "dominguero" pintando sobre un lienzo tensado la arcada de la casa de un vecino. El cuadro no me impresionó mucho, ni el extraño artillugio en el que

"Cuando nuestro pequeño "círculo progre" consumía Pollock, yo fumaba De Kooning"

“Llegué a la pintura y a la abstracción de manera natural, desde el dibujo”

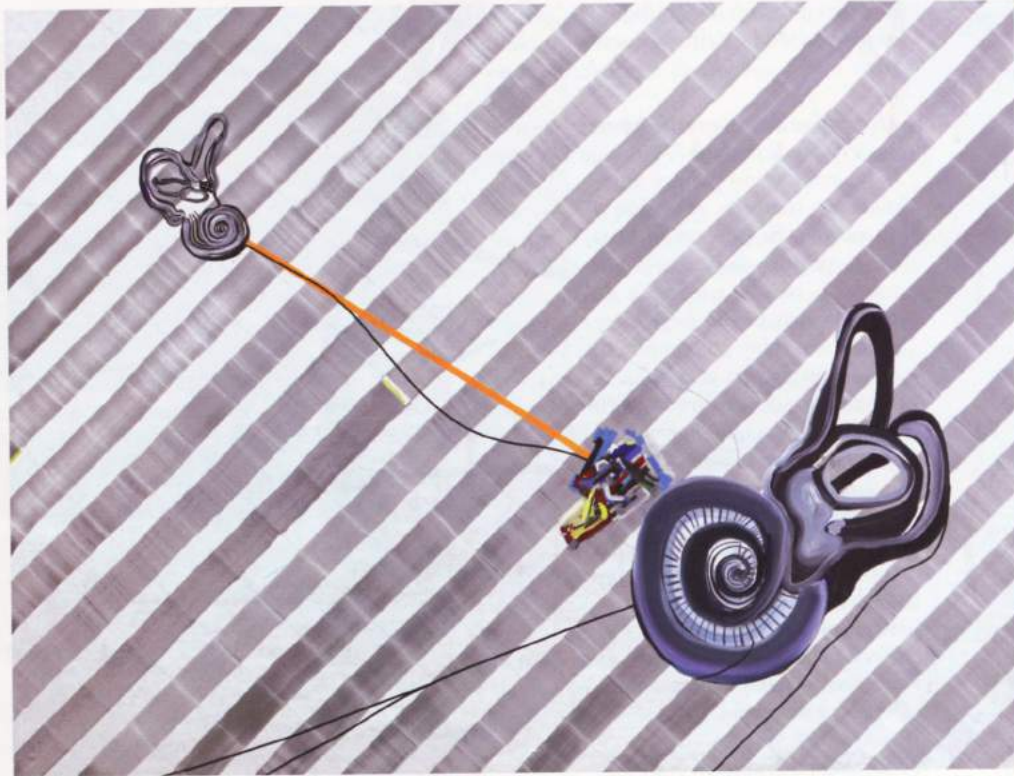
se apoyaba, pero aquella suntuosidad cromática intensísima, indescriptible, del color, óleo, ordenado en pequeños montones, en la parte superior de la paleta y destruidos por abajo, tan intenso y brillante, mezclado, restregado, esparcido y tramado sobre el resto de superficie, se hacía insoportable a mis ojos. Un placer excesivo, indescriptible, creo que allí me enamoré por primera vez. Luego, ya en el instituto, la cosa se complicó. Se complicaba cada año que teníamos como asignatura Dibujo Artístico, porque el profesor siempre se empeñaba en llamar a mis padres e intentar convencerles de la importancia de enviarme a estudiar Bellas Artes. Por desgracia Artes o Bellas Artes solo significaban “pensión”, no eran conceptos tan reconocidos en mi casa como la precariedad de la economía familiar. Como cada año la historia solía repetirse, la cosa terminó siendo bastante frustrante y yo seguí dibujando a escondidas.

¿Cómo pasó de la figuración a la abstracción?

Para mí, la palabra “abstracción” no es solo un término estilístico, ni tampoco un concepto cerrado. En la vida abstraemos constantemente, porque hemos de sobrevivir, y en términos pictóricos diría que la abstracción ya no es una zona acotada sino una especie de burbuja, un espacio o hábitat membranoso y flexible del lenguaje pictórico; que se mueve para expandirse o concretarse y se nutre cada vez más de la vida misma, tanto orgánica como intelectual. Personalmente nunca he sentido la abstracción como opuesta a la idea de representación y personalmente creo que el viejo dilema y separación entre ambas categorías quedó ya obsoleto hace mucho tiempo, por raquitismo, por excesivo afán didáctico, clasificatorio, por el afán de encasillar lo no encasillable. Me gusta moverme entre fronteras, siempre ha sido así, de ahí mi dificultad en definir o explicar las cosas que hago; pienso que si me resultara muy fácil explicarlas quizás no debería hacerlas. Llegué a la pintura y a la abstracción de manera natural, desde el dibujo. Ya en la escuela hacia mis pinitos y a veces me saltaba aquellos sórdidos ejercicios académicos, de estudio de modelos, para detenerme o desviarme hacia una mancha o un color vibrante, me parecía mucho más interesante, novedoso y divertido.

¿Le ha influenciado el expresionismo abstracto americano?

De chaval pasé muchos veranos en el



Desplazado, matriz, 2011

Voyage, voyage

“Los viajes suelen ser muy estimulantes, excepto si son en grupo porque entonces la magia se rompe —explica el artista—. Yo procuro no abusar de ellos, porque el estudio, sobre todo siendo pintor reclama casi todo tu tiempo. Además, aprendí a viajar como Borges, desde muy pequeño, a través de los sueños y la imaginación. Paisajes y lugares, ciudades, lagos, océanos y desiertos, crecían sin demasiado esfuerzo, sobre todo, a través de aquel montón de datos y monótonas explicaciones que contenía en el árido libro de geografía universal de segundo de bachillerato, apenas ilustrado con escasísimas fotos en blanco y negro, bastante mal impreso, por cierto. Desde entonces no he parado de viajar y ya he visitado casi todos los lugares del mundo. Muchas veces viajo en primera, desde la cama, y otras en segunda, o en tercera o cuarta, desde el estudio, a veces algo agobiado, tratando de recomponer esos grises semiborrados del libro, desde la mezcla de casi todos los colores posibles. Mi viaje a Nepal en 1989 fue muy revelador. Más allá y aparte de las 12.000 diapositivas y los incomparables amaneceres frente y detrás del Everest; más allá de la belleza del verde turquesa de Kosaikunda, de aquellas pinturas, colores y templos. Más allá de la arquitectura y las plazas de las otrora poderosas ciudades, de la esencial humildad de los campesinos y los caminos de montaña, siempre está presente en el estudio la sonrisa de aquel pequeño nepalí que me encendió la luz invitándome a entender que la pintura podía ser una práctica más especial y profunda que el encuentro o la fidelidad a un estilo: la búsqueda en cada cuadro de algo tan preciado y esencial como aquello que él llamó “su diferencia”. Desde el respeto y la humildad, me dijo, en cada gesto y durante todo el proceso, siempre alerta, aprendiendo a escuchar y sentir

pueblo y recuerdo aun bien las formas, las imágenes y paisajes que las manchas de humedad, los desconchados y los nudos configuraban en las maderas del techo de la habitación donde solía dormir. “Lo primero que ves permanece en ti” dice una frase que me gusta y yo pase muchas horas interpretando, recorriendo aquellas manchas con la mirada. El Expresionismo Abstracto americano, de algún modo, eran también manchas. Lo descubrí ya en Valencia, en Bellas Artes, y por supuesto que me influenció, me era familiar. Vi un cuadro de Joan Mitchel, reproducido en pequeño y me encantó. Era una pintura soberbia, que he visto en directo mucho después, y aun siendo la reproducción bastante deficiente me influyó. Fue como una fisura que se abría hacia un horizonte nuevo en cuanto a formas de mirar y de ver. El horizonte de un planeta plano llamado *Pintura* comenzaba a extenderse mucho más allá de aquellas enseñanzas académicas guiadas por la verdad de un modelo. Tàpies también me sirvió, lo encontré merodeando entre desconchados, entre graffitis de tiza, chamboris y puertas viejas en el antiguo barrio judío de Valencia. Más tarde, mientras que en nuestro pequeño “círculo progre” consumían Pollock, yo fumaba De Kooning. Siempre me ha encantado su frase: “La pintura es como un ragú” y lo considero, junto con Philip Guston uno de mis pintores favoritos. De Kooning es el puente que, en pintura, abraza el deseo y el desparpajo descarnado, tan genuinamente

americano, con la tradición exquisita de la cultura europea.

¿Hay algo de automatismo en su proceso de trabajo?

Sí, claro, hay un plan, y automatismo también, reflexión y abandono. Si uno no se libera, la pintura lo acusa y enmudece, su voz no acaba de coagular, ni puede percibirse su susurro. Hay algo implícito en la pintura, en el dibujo, la danza, poesía..., sobre todo en las artes relacionadas con el cuerpo: la inmediatez. Calvino lo ilustró bien para hablar de Leopardi. A veces con un solo trazo se resuelve un cuadro que se venía gestando y madurando durante meses. Pero es raro que esto se produzca así: ¡Zaas! sin pasar por las fases de zozobra, sin meditación, reflexión y distancia.

Sus cuadros sugieren una mirada a través de una ventana a algo que está en expansión, algo que podría no tener límites, ¿es como revivir hoy el drama barroco de poder ser solamente partícipes de un instante de un mundo infinito y desconocido?

Pues sí, algo parecido. Todo está en expansión desde el universo hasta nuestro crecimiento, nuestra visión de las cosas. Por fortuna, salimos hace ya tiempo de una moderna Edad Media y descalificamos muchas cosas y valores que eran antes verdad, acompañados por las inevitables crisis ideológicas y la caída del optimismo, la ciencia se dirige cada vez con más certeza al descubrimiento de mayores incertidumbres y el arte se da cuenta de que no solo es verdad aquello que surge de la razón, por mucho que se empuñen algunos; sino que la intuición y el ensayo imaginativo son cada vez más necesarios al arte y a la sociedad.

¿Hay alguna relación entre la fotografía y la pintura?

Claro, es una vieja historia de amor. Durante más de un siglo la fotografía y la pintura se han estado admirando y rechazando, en privado y en público, sin dejar de ser una referencia la una para la otra.

Su esposa, Victoria Civera, también es pintora, ¿cómo es la vida diaria de una pareja artística?, ¿comparten taller?, ¿ideas?

Compartimos vida y tenemos talleres separados, Vicky es una gran artista y yo siempre he disfrutado mucho con su trabajo. Al ser tan polifacética, no solo pinta



Zebulón Caos, 2009

Buscando el equilibrio

Uslé tiene estudio en Nueva York y en la localidad cántabra de Saro "Es un contraste fabuloso, muy necesario. Vivir en Nueva York y en Saro es algo completamente distinto. 'Uno es de donde respira' y yo me muevo entre ambos sitios. Muchas veces, aquí se ha leído o encontrado en mi obra un llamémosle carácter americano y por contra en América mi obra suele verse como europea. Entre NY y Saro encuentro un cierto equilibrio y suficiente contraste, estímulo. Vivir en ambos sitios es como vivir en dos épocas diferentes y sobre todo a dos tiempos, a dos velocidades distintas. Me encanta la naturaleza y la defiendiendo por encima de todo. En Saro me dedico sobre todo a pintar y a disfrutar del monte, del campo, de los animales. Dedico mucho tiempo a plantar árboles (otra de mis pasiones), a buscar setas, y de nuevo a pintar. Miras una nube dibujando y te vacías. Pero al cabo de un tiempo largo aquí, necesito también el veneno y la gran ciudad. Cuando voy allí, a NY ya en el avión siento mi cabeza inundada progresivamente de imágenes, imágenes y pinturas que van creciendo yuxtapuestas, superponiéndose unas a otras, amenazando seriamente con salir de mi cerebro. Cuando llego al aeropuerto he pintado ya 1001 cuadros y al entrar en mi casa, en Manhattan, lo primero que hago es abrir la puerta del estudio para asegurarme de que estoy allí y comprobar también que todo sigue allí. Necesito ambos lugares, no me imagino viviendo sólo en un sitio."

como hago yo, necesita mucho espacio para construir sus piezas, desplegar y almacenar sus obras. En NY ella trabaja en su taller de Williamsburg y yo en Manhattan, pero nuestra relación profesional es muy grande dado que se fundamenta en el respeto y la mutua admiración. Comprimir dos egos juntos en un único espacio no es fácil ni productivo, tanto física como emocionalmente. Compartir estudio puede resultar explosivo de ahí que ambos prefiramos tenerlos separados.

¿Qué le aporta su jardín?, ¿siente añoranza de él cuando está en Nueva York?

Tranquilidad, la posibilidad de cambiar de chip, pasear, meditar, perderme un rato entrando en otros microcosmos sin tener que salirme de la finca. No, no lo echo en falta porque el jardín siempre es interior, de ahí la frase: "quien ama a mi jardín me ama a mí" En ciudades grandes como Nueva York también hay jardines y parques estupendos. Tanto en Saro como en NY salgo del estudio y procuro

desconectar y como me gustaron siempre los árboles procuro plantar muchos en Saro y disfrutar viéndolos crecer. En NY me acerco a esos árboles inmensos, amigos impresionantes, para admirarlos y sentirme junto a ellos.

Su hija, Vicky Uslé, también es pintora, ¿cree que los hijos de los pintores reconocidos lo tienen más fácil?

No sé en otros casos. En principio, podría parecer que sí, que se parte con ventaja, pero creo que es al revés, pues no debe resultar nada fácil salir a un escenario donde se va a ser juzgado, cargando de antemano con un saco extra, repleto de ojos y miradas que señalan. Nosotros respetamos su decisión pero no participamos en ella. Va a tener que trabajar muy duro para soportar las voces que siempre le restregarán el nombre de sus padres. Pero Vicky es muy dura, además de encantadora y talentosa.

¿Escucha música cuando pinta?

Sí claro, pero no en todo momento, ni siempre la misma. La selecciono dependiendo del momento, tanto mío como de la obra. Suelo poner música, pero no inmediatamente tras entrar en el estudio, sino después de mirar un rato, tras haber planificado lo que voy a hacer. Entonces selecciono la música y comien-

“Aprendí a viajar, desde muy pequeño, a través de los sueños y la imaginación”

zo una especie de rutina, hago colores, nuevos colores, salto un poquito para desentumecer y vuelvo a revolver los colores. Dependiendo del momento en que me encuentro en el proceso prefiero una música más tranquila, íntima o agresiva. A veces me sorprende a mí mismo cantando ópera, rancheras o gregoriano, tarareando lento música minimal, Satie, Marin Marais, Phillip Glass o Brian Eno ¡depende!

¿Qué le gusta leer?

Disfruto mucho leyendo, sobre todo poesía, aunque paradójicamente suelo leer poca. Necesito estar en el punto, “abandonado” para leer poesía, entonces es tremendo y delicioso: cómo un solo verso, a veces una sola palabra, ¡me sugiere y comunica tantas cosas! Con el ensayo también disfruto y aprendo de manera más tangible, aplicable, diría. Barthes, Calvino, Virgilio... me contaron siempre muchas cosas. La novela que descubre el alma y ciertos caminos a medias entre la pena y el lenguaje, como en Bernhard, por ejemplo, que ayuda sin disfraces a reconocer, a admitir la infancia de uno



Enlace imposible, 2011

mismo. Ahora he comenzado a releer *Mi último suspiro*, lo leí hacia el 95 o 96 y necesito disfrutarlo de nuevo.

A usted también le gusta escribir, ¿qué relación hay entre lo que escribe y lo que pinta?

No, que va, yo no soy escritor, ni me siento capaz de seducir contando historias o escribiendo versos, aunque a veces nos atrevamos a expresarnos de otro modo, en un medio diferente al habitual. A veces siento la “tentación” y creo que me gustaría escribir sobre pintura, o sobre aspectos relativos, que rodean a nuestra profesión, pero siento que no sería suficientemente libre para hacerlo; así que de momento dejémoslo así. El lenguaje es fundamental para la expresión, pero la necesidad, el deseo de comunicar es aún mayor, y yo quizás sublimo mucho ese deseo pintando, esa picaresca que a veces siento como próxima: la necesidad de nombrar cosas con la palabra. Pero al menos de momento solo me revuelve el deseo. ¡Veremos!.

Marga Perera

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