
Esteve Subirah

No more landscapes

Physicality strategies

curated by Jordi Vernis

08.06.2019 – 09.11.2019

New words, far from expanding the vocabulary, disrupt the relationship between terms and things. In 1984, Jacques Lacan warned us about neologisms: they are empty words which can become relevant over time and have a linguistic role commonly accepted, but their main task it is to stop signification.

In 2008, **Esteve Subirah** (Ullà, 1975) decided to stop generating new pictures. The snapshot proliferation strengthens the empty structure described before, which is the same that selfie culture needs to feed a chain of expectations created by pictures: to add immediately new pictures to the already taken.

No more landscapes propose an exercise to adapt this resistance in Subirah, restricted in this case to the particular relationship between **landscape and representation**. In order to do that, the exhibition brings together some works, carried out since 2012, which raise the necessity to think territory from notions related to **physicality** and **materiality**.

Forma 17 (2014) deal with landscape through press-agency photographs which show scenes of the Francoist occupation and of the exile of the republicans towards the French border at the end of the **Spanish Civil War**. On the other hand, *Travaux en cours* (2019) focuses on thirty images of reservoirs in northern **Algeria** which were built during the **colonial era**. These snapshots were taken by Henri Eichacker (1871-1958), an Algerian photographer who made important reports, mostly about European new constructive techniques which were applied in the African country.

In both series we find occupied spaces, and it is remarkable how Esteve brings out different contrasts: Spanish Civil War as a testing of the Second World War and the Algeria reservoirs as a civil architecture test which will be carried out in the metropolis afterwards; war as a brutal intervention of a place and reservoirs morphology as a brutal intervention in nature; **place of memory** and **forgotten place**; center and periphery of the historical narrative.

But, by exposing both works simultaneously, the natural and social environments are gaining importance. This fact gives Esteve the advantage to exploit some needed narratives of the photography as a document. The tension existing in the material analysis of images historically charges has the potential to face the territory not as a representation, but as a **stage**, a place for **action** and **intervention**.

This does not mean to turn historical facts into an abstraction, as if they were a burden, and neither environment as backdrop. We are talking about stage, not setting. A place for experience, not an *atrezzo*. Here it is inevitable to cross ourselves with some contemporary criticisms against modern concepts about nature. Conceiving space as a valid dimension for action from the point of view of the subject has been one of the most denounced vices in modern thinking.

It was necessary to left behind **rationalism** because it was handled physicality as something exclusively instrumental, something which justifies territory transformation and modification under **parameters merely quantitative**. This point of view was very helpful to capitalism and to a dangerous ethics of conquest. But now we are talking about environments not as an action field to the subject who dominated it, but as a place where the experience of time is taking place.

Another common element on Esteves's works is the **site-specific** intervention. *S/T* (2019) is a piece formed by two recycled canvasses which **cover** a large part of the exhibition space. By doing this he is avoiding not only the generation of new images but also its display. In essence, this methodology serves to avoid the desire and prejudice projections over at any location –the danger of representation-, and the colonial gaze over it.

As it has been previously highlighted by Marta Negre and Eudald Camps, Esteve Subirah's artistic practice is moving against the notion of landscape as a genre and against to the traditional participation of photography in fostering this idea. *Forma 10* is a sculpture made from the negative of Cau del Duc cave (Montgrí). Or better said, its filling. This is one of those "physicality strategies" which allows the complete knowledge of a place in a more accurate way than the photographic image.

Despite this, a bigger approximation to this location has as a result an object which takes distance to the Cau del Duc. It represents without any reference of the thing represented. It is, as in most Esteve's works, a sort of Lacanian cartography which combines both privation and intervention in order to change any stable scheme about the relationship place-form-picture.

Forma 10, 2012 (P/A). Iron, 8 x 9 x 19 cm / 2 postcards

Forma 17 A, 2014. 23 photographs. Variable dimensions.

Forma 17 B, 2014. Photograph, 30 x 24 cm / email, 21 x 29.7 cm

Travaux en cours, 2019. 23 photographs. Variable dimensions.

Fisicitat A, 2019. Photograph. 24 x 32 cm

Fisicitat P, 2019. Photograph. 52 x 60 cm

S/T, 2019, 650 x 180 cm / 360 x 182 cm

Esteve Subirah

Since 1997 he has participated in multiples exhibitions, among others, at Espai 13 of Fundació Joan Miró, at Bòlit Centre d'Art Contemporani in Girona, at La Casa Encendida in Madrid (Generaciones. Premios de Arte Caja Madrid), at Sala 15 of Hospici d'Olot, at Casa Elizalde in Barcelona and at Biennal d'Art de Girona. He has shown also his works at art fairs in Denmark (Art Copenhagen 2004) and Belgium (Lineart Gent 2006). He has been selected to the grant KREAS of Ajuntament de Girona, and also to the Generaciones of Caja Madrid and to the Spanish contemporary art promotion program of Ministerio de Cultura with the project *Perdre les formes*. Recently he has participated in the project *Lloc, memòria i salicòrnia* in the context of Pletera desurbanization (l'Estartit, Girona) with the site specific and permanent intervention *Forma 26 Pletera*.