

What matters is exactly where the patches of colour fall and how the parts transform into sensibility. It isn't so much a question of painting trees but one of recognising his painting in the woods.

A limitless forest that we carry within us and which the artist has been exploring for many years, he clarifies concepts, adjusts sentiments to ideas, incorporates them into pictorial language with talent and imagination, and tells us all about what he encounters, with the passion of the sincere artist who knows that falsehood can't dwell in painting. The leaves talk, revealing the artist's motivation, a romantic being for whom nature and consciousness are inseparable manifestations. Image doesn't represent, it interprets existence. Novalis wrote: the secret way runs inwardly.

Pedro González creates an imaginary wood, forged by oblivion and desire. A painterly bound wood, subject to its emotive and formal syntax: what matters is the pictorial essence of the work, how the artist resolves the pictorial problems and assumes courage. Pedro González thinks that "what matters about a painter isn't what he is saying, but rather how Rubens finds the solution to a painting where three suspended bodies appear, or how Velázquez tackles the redness of a floor. The sea or the woods are excuses for painting, and nothing else. Furthermore, they're not real, the image is invented. Frankly I continue to be an abstract painter. The thing is that

it is easy in my most recent works to identify the colour areas."

This quotation is revealing as to the painter's working praxis, of painting as a living and self-sufficient organism, to which he has to add his personality. An ordered will that tries to settle chaos, an existential stance that is engaged in the creation of new images, an effort to transform ideas into visual, existential metaphors. His paintings, other than being a reflection on painting and its technical possibilities are images of infinity, of the untiring movement of things and ideas, of a global life vision that does not stop at small detail.

In his painting the artist doesn't allow the trees to hide the wood from us: in a sense, what we see are sketches, general notes rather than specific definitions. His work can be seen, can be interpreted and construed as a whole, for the parts serve the spirit of structure. When the idea is clear, then the elements have a subordinate role. The woods of Pedro González aren't the leaves and the trunks, it is the forest in itself, the concept of the wood, the abstract and precise image that the word "wood" evokes. The elements therein contained must be present, they are formal parts of the discourse. Nothing is gratuitous, although everything is interchangeable, the role of a birch tree can be perfectly taken on by any bush, in the heart of the woods, the pulsations are so immense that they engulf all things. And, though, like in the fractal images of the

hologram, a part reproduces the whole, it is nonetheless the concept of the wood that proves all-unifying.

It is that same distant gaze that contemplated the sea and didn't miss the waves, with their foamy and liquid presence; yet it tried in effect, to make us feel the essence of the sea. Now, in a similar way, he invites us to unravel the forest, to make out what lies concealed in its tortuous shapes, to experience what image really is. Let's forget about the anecdotal, if we want to penetrate this wood that is his own as well, don't count the acanthus leaves, listen to their inner heartbeat.

To put all of these ideas and many others on the canvas is the painter's ambition. In an epoch that is enthralled by the appearance of things it is hard to look deeper, to sort out the leaves in order to feel the tree. Anecdotes impose their virtuality on essence. The décor of the table and the cost of the menu all too often diminish the importance of culinary pleasure. Let's not swallow, we should think and feel, interpret and change what we dislike. Let's nourish our choice, we should take from the wood that which aids our development, says Pedro González and his painting. The shape of things guard their identity, and in the discovery of what grants them consistency there are many offshoots. Don't stop at the obvious, at the wood. As Luis Sepúlveda's indians say, "During the day there is man and the jungle. At night, man is the jungle".



## REVIEWS

**INEZ VAN  
LAMSWEERDE**  
FASHIONING  
THE HUMAN BODY  
  
BY BENJAMIN WEIL

In H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, the travelling scientist has conceived such a device to take a journey into time looking for a state of civilization when humans live in peace and harmony among each other, when destructive impulses have been ruled out, and when only constructive energies remain: a dream for the return to the Golden Age

of humankind. After numerous attempts, he lands in the 21st century, when he at first thinks he finally has discovered what he has been looking for: young and healthy looking blond people all dressed in white seem to be living in a state of leisurely peace. Unfortunately, he later finds out that those people have no sense of community – they would not rescue a

drowning woman: they have no culture – books are kept as relics and do not represent anything else for these people since they do not read – and they are enslaved by monsters who live underground, treating them merely as cattle.

This vision of the future where evil is clearly separated from purity and innocence seems to echo a paranoid fantasy that has been prominent during this century, it is not very different from the Orwellian predictions for the future as enounced in “1984,” wherein “Big Brother” regulates and controls the life of supposedly innocent minds. This fantasy on the future of humanity seems to be an intrinsic part of Judeo-Christian thinking, which posits the quest of humankind as an attempt to regain the perfected moment of the origin of creation. The nostalgia for that moment can be understood as the basics for the image that the world of mass media has been consistently promoting. Youth, beauty, health and happiness seem to be the key concepts that signify the original innocence and therefore define the goal each human should be willing to attain: these signs somehow appear to be more important than what they actually stand for.

Fashion models have recently become the quintessential incarnation of that fantasy, where what merely counts is the image of perfection. The female body further becomes the icon of a somehow Faustian cult that celebrates eternal youth. This supermodel phenomena reveals a collective fantasy which tends to perpetuate the position of womankind as the incarnation of grace and beauty. Thus, every woman is encouraged, even expected to tend towards becoming that ideal.

In Western culture, the human hand has consistently adapted nature to its own needs, as well as to the topical representation it had of its beauty. As a result, a shift has occurred, which posits nature as an entity that has been untouched by human hands, when in fact, it has definitely ceased to exist. After having developed science as an instrument to master and consequently modify its natural environment, humankind is now adapting itself to the nature it has engineered: it has extended the landscape onto its own body: not

unlike plants and gardens, the body has to be manicured precisely, and even bred within specific constraints to create an illusion of perpetuity, beauty, and grace that future generations will call human, the same way we call nature what has been skillfully arranged by our ancestors. We are now entering a state of assisted mutation. This is the fate of humans that will never stop thinking they are the only species that have the right to change the course of “nature.” In the Victorian era, landscaping beautiful gardens and breeding extraordinary animals was the expression of the utmost taste and luxury. Cosmetic surgery and the illusion of eternal youth it implies have now become the ultimate form of consumerism.

Taking their cue from those postulates, the photographs of Inez van Lamsweerde explore the possible outgrowth of that situation, taking that vision to the point when they would result in the monstrosity of de-humanized models. Her computer engineered images represent a state of humanity when bodies are ageless and flawless. With her “Final Fantasy” series, the artist exposes what the logic of using younger models would eventually lead to, working with three year old girls and modifying the pictures to make them look like adults; the purity and innocence of childhood as suggested by the fashion magazines takes another meaning when children’s bodies are reduced to a surface of collective fantasy. This appropriation of youth somehow evokes a morbid feeling of pedophilia. The de-sexualized models of the “Thank You Thighmaster” series furthers the feeling of un-sexiness that the slick magazine image presents: to be desirable has now become dissociated from sensuality. Most religions are based on the perpetuity of the mind. The new cult displaces that worship onto the body, which seems to expose the terror of that form of life disappearing, when ecological disasters and geopolitical unrest strongly question the future of humankind; the fear of Armageddon that is typical of the end of a millennium is enacted in a major way.

Somehow, this formal shift also signifies a change in the construction of

identity as brought by the advent of new forms of communication. The increasing amount of digital transactions brings up a functional displacement of the body that can probably be compared to the one that occurred when the written form took over the oral transmission of information. It is not only a matter of scale: the computer becomes an extension of the body that enables it to reach further out into the world for more information and exchange. The effect can more likely be measured in terms of change in the relationship one maintains with the Other’s body. Inez van Lamsweerde’s perfected shapes evoke a world where interactions will no longer be based on any form of physical exchange, and certainly not penetration; hence, the models whose orifices have been deliberately closed. Her human bodies are self sufficient. They are also immune to any form of disease which is nowadays associated to physical exchange, and specifically any interaction that may be related to desire and its satisfaction. With the development of the AIDS crisis, physical contact has increasingly been associated to death. Virtual reality and fantasies that derive from such new modes of communication signify protection and generate a feeling of safety.

Inez van Lamsweerde at first operated with simple artifices such as make up and a thorough exploration of photographic techniques: she subsequently proceeded to use computer technology to further investigate the absurd quality of that predicament; her computer manipulations also allude to the development of increasingly sophisticated technology used for the reshaping of the human body. Somehow, the screen becomes a magic mirror which enables one to modify one’s image according to one’s desires and projection of self-identity. Inez van Lamsweerde seems to suggest that her manipulations function similarly with her “original” subjects, thus reflecting upon the causality of such practice as plastic surgery: the image becomes an anticipation of reality rather than being a means of representation. The Bionic body no longer being the sole privilege of TV series heroines, we are now gradually entering a period when one

will be able to fix and shape one's body according to one's desires and health needs. Genetic engineering will fashion the humans to be [1], while one can actually preview the reconstruction of one's body with computer assisted technology; and gene therapy will soon become part of common medical practice. The artist's work can be envisioned as the prefiguration of a world when people have finally been given the possibility of choosing what they want to look like, thus questioning the new impact models could have on the definition of identity: will everyone look one way for a week, and then change to the next "idol?" This will greatly affect the manner in which identity is constructed: it will soon be less a matter of socio-historical background as it will be the result of willful alterations made to the body and related appropriations of the Other's identity. In exposing the possible results of such approach to the body both in magazines and within the context of art, Inez van Lamsweerde confronts the viewer to her/his relationship to collective fears and aspiration; in doing so, she possibly denounces fashion as an instrument of social conditioning and particularly so when she chooses the magazine site to expose her work, since she then operates in direct confrontation with the "regular" fashion pictures that she overtly questions. Although she has developed work that is more specifically meant to be shown in the context of art, Inez van Lamsweerde does not mark any specific distinction in the way she relates to the commercial work that is commissioned from the one she spontaneously produces for the art viewing public. She might simply use the art site as an experimental one. In that sense, the display of her work in this context enables her to turn the viewing experience inside out: the world becomes more visual, more like a three dimensional representation of images.

[1] See Primo Levi: "I sintetici" in "Vizio di Forma", Giulio Einaudi Editore s.p.a., Torino, 1971 & 1987, where the author describes a state of scientific development that enables full engineering of human life.



## HERETICAL MINIMALIST

BY GERARDO MOSQUERA

Florencio Gelabert Soto, (Havana 1961), suddenly appeared with a work in 1982 that proved to be an historical landmark in the transformation of contemporary Cuban culture: *Hommage to a Column*. This piece is the paradigm of his first period that dealt with the poetics of Havana, epitome of eclecticism –Alejo Carpentier's "City of Columns", whose "style is precisely its entire absence of style"– and its ruins. Thanks to the Cuban revolution, Havana was spared the urban speculation that transformed other Latin American metropoli during the 1960's, for it is the only city that has retained its historical features. Well before such dates it was a capital of ineffable personality, the fourth most important in Latin America during the 30's, 40's and 50's. The halting of its development has turned it into a museum-city, that reveals the complete history of the Latin American metropolis, with its colonial areas, neoclassical, eclectic, art déco and modernist traits, all juxtaposed in a huge mosaic. The circumstances that propitiated its singular conservation have also led to the abandon which has gradually reduced it to ruins. This adds that element of charm that any ruin has for anyone who isn't forced to live in it.

The originality and the impact of those works by Gelabert lie in the fact that they managed to suggest all of this process in synthetic images, concentrated and derived from the poetry of minimalism. The works evoked the atmosphere of so many of the damp old houses of the Vedado, of so many delapidated mansions of El Cerro of those kilometeric portals with their array of columns in different series, in the style of a huge "Carl Andre", each one with a different capital; of countless residences vaunting their personality in spirals of cement-work, of so much concrete classically disguised, sand oozing out of the cracks, of so many

parts of the city on the rubbish tip, with remains of statues and ornaments that the artist Carlos Garaicoa presently rescues and documents, in a critical performance of the city's dereliction, simultaneously captivated by its fascination. Another significant point about Gelabert is that he used cement in sculpture in order to represent cement in buildings. Modelled concrete columns for which modelled concrete sculptures acted as metaphors, an indirect tropes of how the ductility of this modern material enabled foremen to simulate in the city the grandiloquent sculptural style of marble and stone.

We can see that in Gelabert's work there is an expressive concentration, based on the mixture of the material and the informal with the minimal, that reveals the clue to his current works. The only individual references could be, at one extreme, Chillida and Noguchi, and at another, Carl Andre. Three heterodox figures, innovatory yet not hybrid.

To use minimalism with lyric aims is an example of "incorrect" adaptation of the tendency. Yet such an heretical effrontery in the appropriation of centralist art by the periphery is a strategy of the postcolonial world, as well as one of the vital processes of postmodernism. At one level it is breaking with eurocentric monism in order to extend a multicultural plurality that is an enriching experience for all. At another, it develops the methodologies and languages that the centres of symbolic power have internationalised in incredible ways. These processes bring rupture with the norm and authentic origin in all fields, mixing, associating, piling up; liberalising and energizing cultural practice.

The somewhat eclectic mobility of Gelabert responds to this artistic "libertinism", very common to Latin America and especially to the Caribbean, a land of neologisms and many tongues, of reggae and Lezama Lima. One of the values of new Cuban art was to reinforce this free will without prejudice in order to reconvert everything that could be useful for its own ends. Gelabert took hold of constructive structures, simplification and sculpture as the locus of