

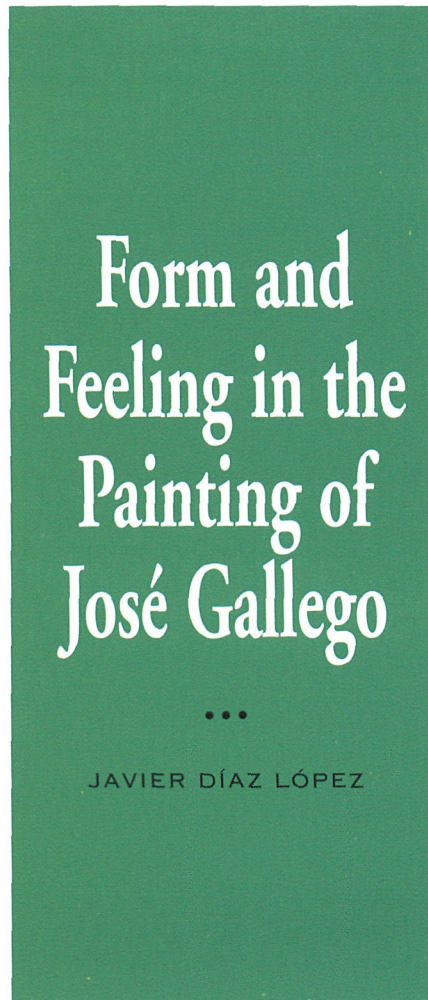
REVIEWS

Every question selects a battle field.
(Kenneth Burke)

Every time I have been asked to write about José Gallego, my home has been marauded by some kind of adverse circumstance, tainted with tragedy. All three times that this has occurred, the strange coincidence has removed me from ordinary reflective life and thrown me headlong in the face of great truths: the fragility of human life, the fleeting nature of existence, the brevity of plenitude, the power of memory.

These repeated circumstances have established the framework for my textual approach to the pictorial world of Gallego. My contact with his work, and also my interpretation of it, is the result of some strange encounter between fate and chance. Paradoxically, this has predisposed me to his painting, to that mosaic of images whose main axis is the representation of instantaneity and its attribute, the fugitive nature of the visual game. But how can one show, or paint, that which is not there, that which can not be grasped by any penetration of the senses?

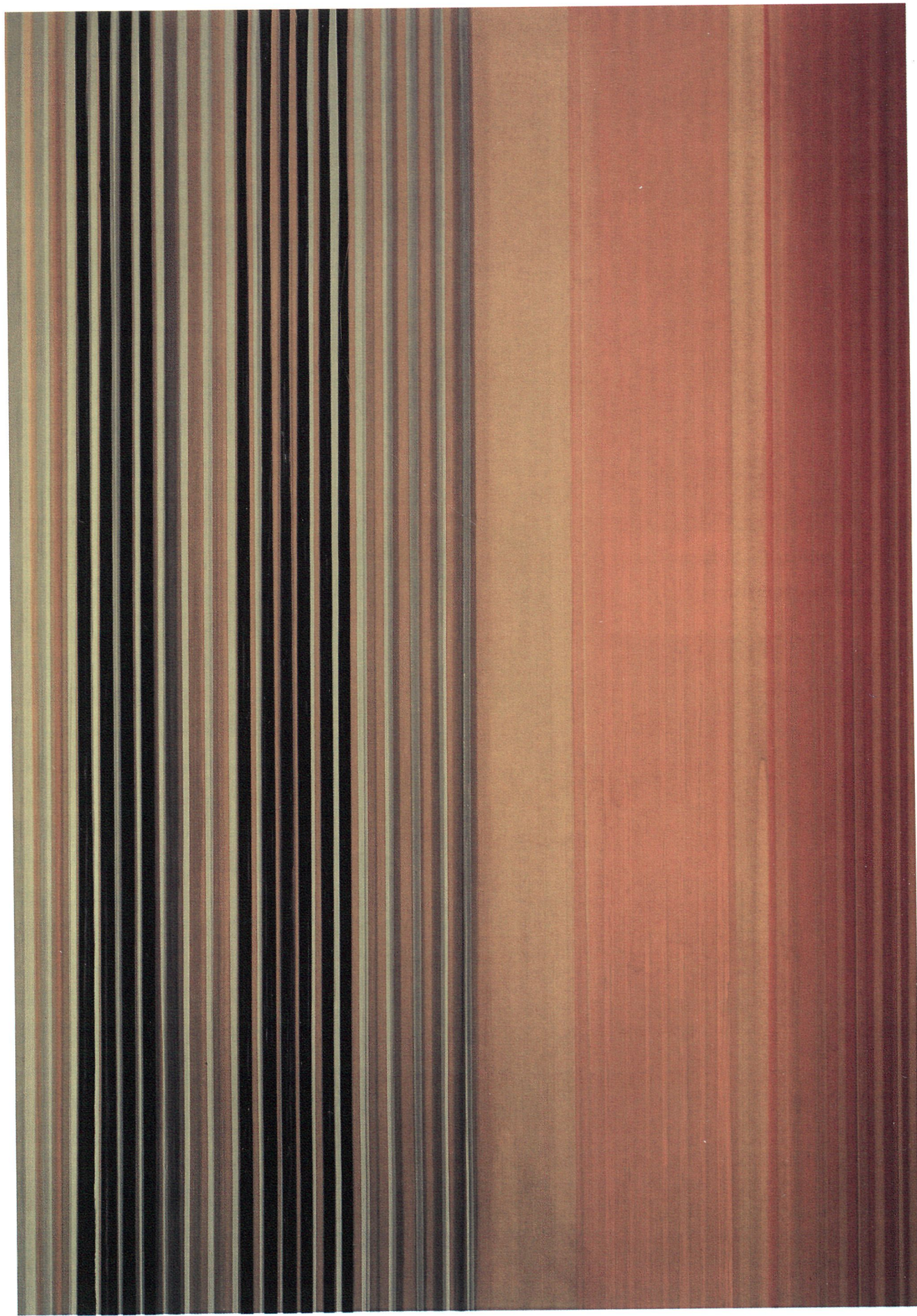
Since 1989 (or even earlier), Gallego's main preoccupation has been the conception and realization of a transductive combinatory which would



José Gallego. *Untitled*, 1994. Fresco.
148 x 110 cm.

allow him access to the secret abodes of painting – those places redolent of tradition, investigation and solitude – places which can never be plundered by modern strategies or momentary fashions. We can clearly see this choice in Gallego's work; his work materializes his continual exploration and exploitation of the possibilities of painting, while keeping a prudent (but not uncomfortable) distance from the discourse which challenges it as living art. In this way, his pictorial universe scans multiple constellations, all saturated with that same energy which emanates from his multi-directional pictorial project, that is, from his concept of painting as a cognitive and aesthetic experience which is open to complementary processes, to the complexity of the world.

At a later point, Gallego's artistic evolution diverges into two interrelated spaces. This methodological mechanism allows him to build a unified pictorial space, where the figurative and the abstract, far from being autonomous spheres, actually correspond and mix together. As a result, each painting becomes a synergetic entity containing interactive and analogous meaning, regardless of – and even in opposition to – its thematic substratum and formal treatment. The artist's paintings are



José Callego. *Untitled*, 1996. Pigmentos y barniz. 201 x 145 cm.

saved from any unilateral reduction by his technique of using chiaroscuro and varnish to remove the visual gap, that imaginary habitus which results from looking at two adjacent paintings from an equal distance: a corvette navigating windward, shifted from sea to sea by a curtain of vertical strips and a field of blinding color. Although the chiaroscuro disfigures the scenic materiality of his compositions, thereby augmenting the feeling of emptiness which defines them, the varnish, which he calls 'shapeless color,' acts as a kind of protective barrier, delimiting the painting like a speculative plane reflecting our glance, or, like a thin film which acts as go-between.

However, beneath this apparent diversity of form, and beyond the creative use of media employed to make and guide it, there lies an eidetic concept of painting, a non-representational world view of the pictorial phenomenon. In this respect, the Gallego's work resembles a collection of prints about the finite nature of meaning. His objects, landscapes and abstractions make up a catalogue of ephemeral feelings which, once dissected, reveal a hidden aspect which usually vanishes during the process of creation. Gallego's paintings evolve on the frontiers of familiarity, between actual vision and memory, where presence and absence intermingle. He reaches the heart of this ambiguity, with a lightness that repositions us as spectators in transit. And the spectator, so accustomed to the routine of 'just

having a look,' so accustomed to being lost in that indeterminate *Lebenswelt*, is able to remember, because, despite the sense of absence, the spectator senses herself in the painting, and comes to remember that painting is all about contemplation and admiration, about the immolation of the object. We are



José Gallego. *Untitled*, 1995. Pigmentos y barniz. 102 x 153 cm.

confronted with a recollection of all we have perceived, an abstraction of things forgotten, a fabrication of fantasies, a vivisection of emotions, and, ultimately, we reach an understanding of Gallego's epic.

For Gallego, the image is the result of the confluence between an impression and an operation. The precarious duration of vision or of a glance involves, in the process of consolidating the painting, the reconstruction and re-creation of what has been retained.

Something different from what was originally seen then springs forth, something different from the ordinary event that was observed. That 'something' – the painting – in fact emanates from the world of life, that hotel which houses us for a short cycle of time, the stage whose soul the painter

seeks to captivate by stirring the conscience and unfolding the imagination.

Javier Díaz López: Writer and art critic. Doctorate in Sociology at the Complutense University of Madrid. Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Cantabria. Specialised in Sociology of art and culture. Co-author of seven books and writer of numerous articles on art, culture and society in newspapers, catalogues and journals. Exhibition co-ordinator at the Palacete-Embarcadero in Santander between 1985 and 1988.