

Subjective events

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The work presented by the sculptor Antonio del Castillo at the Sala del Ateneo of La Laguna is a reflection on time; its title, *Today*, expresses datable time, in exceptional moments that divide the course of existence. "Today opens the exhibition Today" we could say, and it would be a justified redundancy.

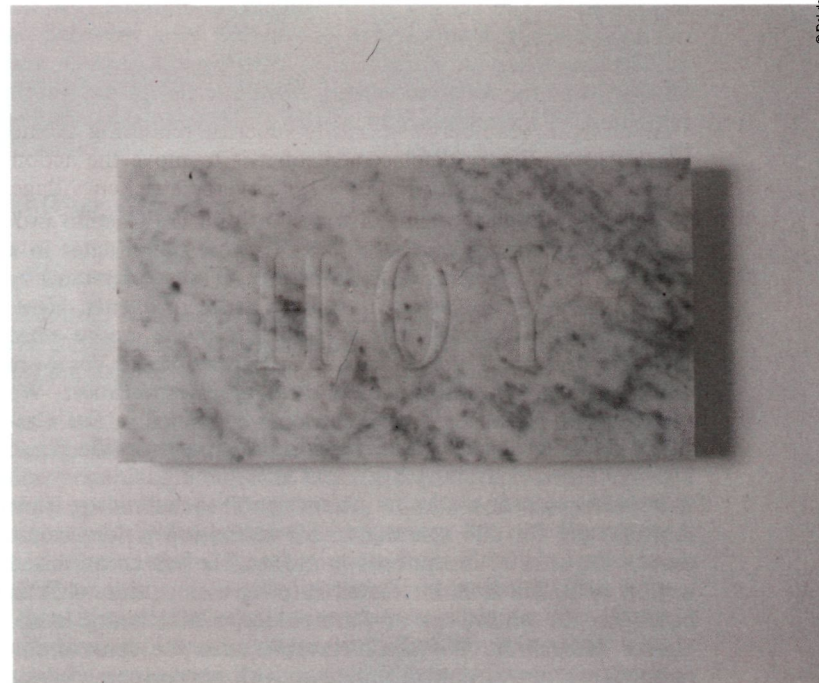
Each steel plate has an inscribed date. Recorded events. The Royal Academy's Dictionary of the Spanish language defines the word *Efeméride*, in its feminine plural form, as: A notable event that is remembered on its anniversary. The commemoration of an anniversary.

The contents of the *Today* exhibition is composed of dates that determine events recorded on steel plates. We can therefore speculate that: 1. These dates represent "notable happenings" in the artist's life. 2. The act of recording these chronological inscriptions constitutes a commemoration. 3. This commemoration lacks the periodical character of an anniversary; it occurs when the date is inscribed and is not repeated. 4. It has no social value, it can't be shared.

The historical objectivity of the event rests in its universality. It affects many people and it is a memorable occasion. Antonio del Castillo's *efemérides* are also memorable, but only for himself. They are enigmatic dates, we aren't told by the artist why they are memorable, no explanation is given. On such a day something happened in his life, and although it may have been banal, he wanted to record it. The definition of a happening as a subjective event is purely up to him; there's no need for consensus or social agreement.

However, objective events have become enigmatic for us too. In a memoryless world, who can recall more than half

a dozen historic dates that affect his country and mankind? If we don't share the sense of the remembered date, the objective event is more gratuitous than the subjective one that the artist proposes; because, at least, he knows what significance the date inscribed on the steel plate holds.



Antonio del Castillo. *Instalación. 1993. Ateneo de La Laguna.*

In the past, artists devoted themselves to representing events. The content of the representation was usually descriptive or allegorical, and at the base was carved a date in roman numerals that fixed in time whatever was being commemorated. Few people today can make out the contents of allegorical representations, as well as the texts inscribed on pedestals. Commemoration becomes an undecipherable ruin. Furthermore, our agonised age doesn't provide us with many events worth recording.

Thus, Castillo's work is not only a poetic proposal on the division of subjective time, but a criticism too of the intended objectivity of objective events.

Instead of allegory, Castillo uses the murky and uniform surface of a steel mirror, on which he records a date. The vague image of the person who looks into the steel mirror contrasts with the precision of the recorded date. The sole objective factor is the date; the reflected human image is ghostly and evanescent, called to disappear, while the date lasts. In order to read the date you have to see yourself. Reading a date is a straight and tautological act, I read a date which is only a date; yet my image doesn't correspond. The reality of the chronology laid down by the artist contrasts with the unreality of the beholder. It is the artist's revenge on the public, and against criticism. What happens if the artist himself looks into his mirror? Then there's a schism between creative subject and his awareness of time.

This invoked duration is fetishistic. We find date fetishism, or the date as fetish of a present that anxiously seeks permanence. The crisis of the subject, blurred in the mirror, is unmasked by the fetishistic objectuality of a date referring to a bygone ego. The I only takes shape as commemoration. Time is made up of remembered events in the form of chronological inscriptions.

The relationship between the objective date and the distorted image of the subject in the mirror is dialectic, for the mirror wouldn't distort if the date hadn't been recorded on it. The engraving of the numbers deforms the surface and also deforms the reflected image. Therefore the chronological reduction of time gives way to the ambiguous character of the image in the mirror.

The chronological vision of time Antonio del Castillo proposes is fragmentary and atomized. To note down dates in a calendar has nothing to do with history, if we understand by history the reasoned articulation of a series of events. Here, dates represent isolated happenings, and as we ignore what they are and what they mean, it is impossible to compose with them any plausible explanation or interpretation. We meet, at this point, the second meaning contained in Del Castillo's critique; against interpretation, in other words, against history. There aren't any historical laws, no significance, and if it exists, we don't know about it. The chronology that Antonio del Castillo sets out in his exhibition is fortuitous: time is the sum of exceptional moments. He has an atomized notion of it. He isn't interested in progression; this work is based on the ontology of Parmenides, where being is all. Unlike Heraclitus. We can't stumble over the same stone twice. He is obsessed with duration, with permanence. In the final analysis, what is art but the objectified dream of the indestructible essence of the experienced moment?

Jorge Ortega:

At first sight, the whole appearance of the young canarian artist's exhibition held at the Manuel Ojeda Gallery, *Anotar* (Notation), is disarmingly conventional in form. The end of year art school project, top-heavy with academicism. However, the final impact of his work, sober and under control, is that of the image which approaches the void, simultaneously appearing as the neutral value of symbol that painting has always been. The interview that follows enabled us to explore the fertile field of implication, absence and presence. *Anotar* is a work-project, issuing from a process of thought and philosophical definition particularly significant for the artist at this moment, who is devoted to the completion of his academic thesis in Cuenca, Spain. It is encouraging to see an artist faithfully notating philosophical tracts, who then searches in the spirit of his art (painting), for a resonance that not only imitates what has been understood, but puts the inspiration derived into practice, adding imagination to thought, testing it, exposing it to different expression. The catalogue is well packed with quotes (Barthes, Foucault, Hockney, Revilla), and it creates an initial implication that precedes the work. He insists very clearly that this preliminary literature isn't "information about the exhibition", but a group of ideas obtained from reading. An immediate projection that is made onto the work from the annotated thought is structuralism's palimpsest text. The privileged domain of the *signifiant*, cultural battle field where significance, old definite sense, becomes an arm-wrestle between historical epochs, in a great progression of interpretation, that superimposes and rejects. The text contains, retains through the word a series of cultural meanings, in a way that is very similar to the workings of image. It is wrong, nevertheless, to imagine Ortega as an art-history researcher, in spite of the Morandi-like aspect of his images. His is an aristocratic search for "elective affinities" of mind, between pure thought, applied thought and the reality of aesthetics.

There's something vague and blurry, like a dirty lens, in his *natures mortes*, plants, bottles, lamps and books. The clarity he pursues is the agent of distance in a clean economy. Among his notes, there's a sad reflection on aphasia, the inability to formalize unitary vision. Ernst Gombrich, stimulated by his great teacher Julius Schlosser, theorized on perception; the application of inherent mind order to external chaos, coercing anarchy into visual pattern. This timeless chemistry gives us the pleasure of sensation: sight. Something aphasic lies in the final vagueness of Jorge's images, something that doesn't quite complete the decoding process of perception. Inside the windowless house, where precise vision should rule, we find instability.