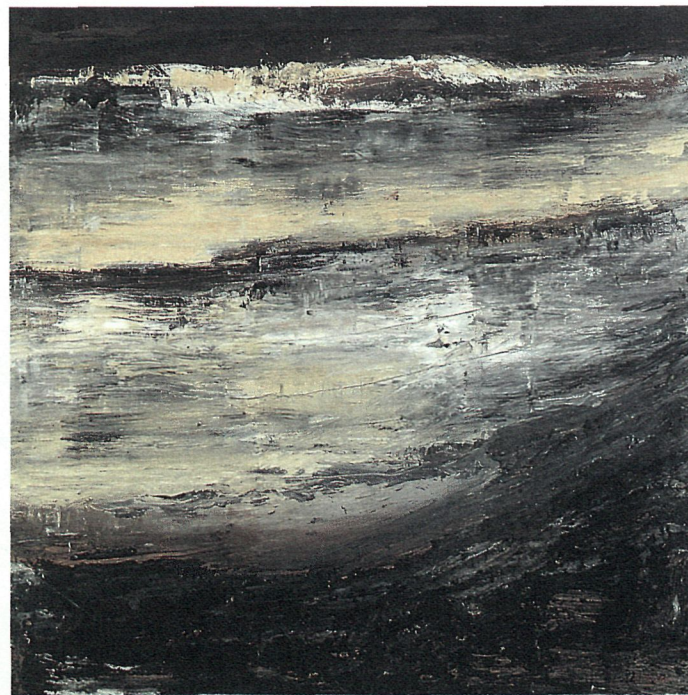


Juan José Gil: On the shore

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Juan José Gil. *Orilla V.* 1993. Tec. Mixt. 120×120 cms. Cortesía: Socaem.

In an old text I wrote about the work of Juan José Gil, I spoke of the window sill's voluptuousness, of the artist standing on the threshold, looking in and out. Now he sets up on the shore, a winding stretch of land-sea, sand, water and foam. A place of transit, of departure and arrival. On the shore we doubt between return or farewell. The wave, in its back and forth movement, that returns, leaves behind a track of foam and disaster. It's a good place to confront the sea of memory with its liquid mirror.

The first striking thing about Juan José's new idea is a paradoxical renouncement. During the past five years the dominant colour of his painting was a nordic blue, which is precisely the hue that disappears in this work, just when he sets off to paint the sea. As if he wanted to state clearly that he takes on the sea obviating visual realism, that the numen has its origin in memory. However, the stratagem the artist uses doesn't produce just quite the desired effect. Only in certain paintings does he avoid narrative ease and imposes intellectual effort on what is merely descriptive. In these paintings the artist discards special effects, and the dramatic intensity that characterizes his production, is further polished by thought, to determine a pictorial space where contingency strikes. Where one can plunge into innermost depths, without fearing the interruption of the clamouring waves.

In those paintings the horizon is smaller, and action concentrates on all of the pictorial space, it isn't confined by horizontal or oblique bands but is deployed with force, creating a speculative universe that urges the eye to wander, and prompts the senses to lose their way.

Juan José Gil moves in a humid, swampy terrain where he tries to beautify expression and to feast the eye, without deteriorating the conceptual structure that, nevertheless is vaguely articulated. Borges used to say that philosophy gives the world a certain sense of vagueness and that this is all the better. Perhaps Gil has decided to land his art with such a dilemma. In any case, the reading offered by his painting is eminently sensitive, and it is known that feeling is the prelude to knowledge. Other authors have indicated, however, that art merely happens, and can't be understood.

When we approach these shore paintings, we hear that pagan roar of the sea that the canarian poet Tomás Morales sang, and which is new in the poetry of Juan José Gil, and up to this point, has been silent. What remains fixed, though, is his investigation into the artistic values of the humid and into the solitude of existence. Neither does his reliance on formal technique that organizes composition vary. In the series, *Paraislas*, it was a vertical strand of light, in *Antropotaburetes* (Anthropostools), the stool, in *Autopistas* (Motorways), a



Juan José Gil. *Orilla IV*. 1993. Tec. Mixt. 120×120 cms. Cortesía: Socaem.



Juan José Gil. *Orilla X*. 1993. Tec. Mixt. 80×80 cms. Cortesía: Socaem.

stretch of road, and in this series, the roaring wave that we see in distance. In my opinion, this device is unnecessary, as we can observe in the paintings that work best in the exhibition, precisely where it is absent.

The strategy of concealment the painter projects is questionable for he is a magnificent painter and his overflowing talent can disconcert the observer who doesn't go beyond the emotive aspects and technical virtuosity. He runs into difficulties when trying to share the open questions made in this work, when it forgets anecdote and demands a compromise with ideas. It is then that we appreciate the artist's expressive ability, embarking on a new analysis of reality that perturbs the senses and takes us to the world of imagination, where all shores, as well as being as real as in life, function at analogical level, as a poet's instrument.

The shore as dream and mnemonic sea, leaving aside its natural physical geography to become mental space. Painting as the construction of a pictorial edifice, of a creative phenomenon, therefore human. Departing from allusion, searching for the efficacy of expression. Man looking out to the horizon of life, going past impression to become lost in that dark side where nothing is clear. There where our identity lies, that some works of art manage to harmonize with. That something we

find in a poem, in certain musical phrases, in some paintings that help us to transcend reality. Juan José Gil moves in this direction and tries through his painting to create metaphors of the impenetrable, of what can be expressed.

The exhibition includes some work on paper, where Gil reveals some clues to his poetical evolution. A certain natural religiosity before the pictorial act that "fuses the relations of man with the divine in the very nature of things", a lesser expressive grandiloquence that responds not only to the simplicity of the material, but to the will of concentrating discourse, that, to avoid mistakes, he prunes of figurative referent, though it still continues to inhabit distance, in the fog, diluted. The work stops being representational and becomes intimate. Colour sheds rhetoric and confronts its destiny.

And, in the middle of the main room, an installation, the first we've seen by the artist, probably a private tribute to his master Juan Hidalgo. A sheet of black water over which hangs a net with black forms. Almost a void, the simple monumentality of a Japanese garden.

In the background the monotonous music of a well pump, progressing like an oriental mantra or like a pitiless minimalist score.