

A QUEST FOR LIGHT.

Vision, according to a scientist specialized in the psychology of visual perception, requires not only the eye, light conditions, and solar refraction, but also interior light, that light that transforms raw sensorial experience, the rough tonal impact, into a perception containing meaning. The light of the mind, we could say, taken as the necessary complement to natural light in the process of creating an intelligible construct. This is the indispensable theoretical nucleus for understanding the sequence of luminous stelae that Wilfried Prager proposes in the exhibit presented here. Light understood as the primary stimulus in a process of formal associations that activates and brings to life affinities and encounters of extraordinary beauty.

Light, in effect, venerated as an omnipotent and fleeting deity, like the elusive image of a transcendent and supra-sensorial nature. “Light, more light” were Goethe’s last words. “The sun is God” was on Turner’s final breath. The mythologies of historical traditions insist on the consequences of the deconstruction of the impact of light: many are the mythical and timeless stories about the sun, the moon, the stars and fire. With their magnetic counterparts: the rainbow and the dawn. The characteristics of a culture, undeniably, appear reflected in the shared and dazzling image of light, the ideal space for the silent conspiracy between nature and the human mind.

The life of light turns out to be an understandable and close correlate of the reality of the sensitive forms that give birth to,

never more clearly stated, the plastic space of images. Let's turn to a diaphanous example. An exceptional central European deserter, the Rhinelander Albert Vigoleis Thelen, in his forgotten novel written in exile in Palma de Majorca during the years between the two world wars -*The Island of the Second Sight. From the Applied Recollections of Vigoleis-*, recounts for us his impressions of the Balearic coast illuminated by the setting sun transforming it into shapes of color. "On the island," he confesses, "I found I was more fascinated by the light than by its infrequent inhabitants. But yes, it is not habitual to speak to the reader about the consanguinity of the light. Understanding by such a strange notion the peculiarities of luminosity that are produced when different qualities of shadows are mixed with each other. The shadows projected and the shadows themselves, complete shadows and half-shadows, join together in a regular manner and in this way create, from the darkness, the enigma of the insular light that disconcerts the traveler. Numerous painters around the world did not believe what their eyes were seeing when they saw this vision for the first time."

The sequence of brilliant and dazzling images that Wilfried Prager arranges here in a tracing of light over time has something unsettling about it, a subtle experimentation about color reproduced with its decisive gradations in luminous intensity, but which also reveals at the same time, perhaps in a register not evident to the superficial glance, the artist's

obstinate and silent fascination with the nature of the landscape. A long and careful reflection of those misleading figurations that have appeared throughout artistic tradition. Prager is a contemporary artist who has lucidly placed his works over the aggressive narrative “isms” that trace and unnecessarily obscure the history of modern art, the transparent marks of diverse and contradictory manners of making sensitive worlds and knowing how to relate them in a temporary display of model-images.

In Prager’s case, a reasonable skepticism seasoned with a certain formal irony no doubt results from the painter’s singular biography: Austrian origins, trained in Paris, and educated in the demanding culture of color. Born in 1964 en Paris, brought up in the warmth of a family of Central European roots –that *world of yesterday*, portrayed with incisive skill by Stefan Zweig launched into a cosmopolitan and polyglot world in which the father, a member of the UNESCO diplomatic service, energetically marked out a horizon of difficult cultural alternatives. Wilfried Prager’s work once again shows the infinite possibilities of the creative assimilation of carefully selected expressive universes.

The latent influence of Alena Kucerova and Miloslav Moucha, among Czech artist friends, adventures the tenuous crepuscular light that illuminates Prager’s early landscapes, the barely sketched silhouettes that dissolve into stains of color without attaining precise figurative definition. Autumn landscapes from the French countryside, naturally, but also landscapes painted from memory rooted in the romantic imagination of a still

diffuse project. Wilfried Prager's artistic experience is debated in this manner, apparently dramatically, within the confines of a dilemma of substantive representation: form or experiment. History or autonomous plastic discovery. Submitted, as well, to painful restrictions that show through a piercing formal appreciation. The favorite place only half-disguised, I insist, by romantic landscapists.

The figures in shadow populate continued accurate notes on nature in rigorous chromatic scale and a wise selection of models of abstraction –the destiny of art-, and propose an early vanguardist reading centered on the geometry of light – Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian-, at the same time as they are submerged in the formal color variables introduced by the New York school of abstract expressionism, as can be easily verified visually. Perhaps the powerful presence of Frank Stella stands out –*Inversión*, 1992, and one example suffices-, but also the arduous inquiry into space-light that explains and justifies the different illusory efforts to develop a “pure science of color”. An art of melancholy, if closely observed, absorbed in discerning how art rectifies and improves nature, if indeed we can still talk this way. But in the same way, and this is not a minor effect, art in the service of fantasy and the fractal discovery of the enigma-light, that unsolvable unknown that conditions the look of time.

Prager's art is paradoxically transfigured now, surprisingly, in an active chamber of chromatic sensations always nuanced by light, that controls the extremes and ensures expressive tensión.

A universe of light-signs that resort to color as the necessary support for its definition in quality of art forms. In short, the overflowing trajectory of light-motifs presented by Wilfried Prager in this exhibit aspires to be something more than the index of skillful oscillations in the gradual spectrum that mediates between light and shadow. Prager shows us, rather, an original scale of formal values that converts the plastic expression of light into a daring display of moments of vision. The perhaps elusive dialogue between the eye and the mind, stated in the classical manner of Leonardo and Dürer. The brain is alerted, faced with the overflowing perception of the retina. The eternal debate of painting, nothing more or less.

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London, summer 2015.