

La Prospettiva is sucking reality

Every gesture has its consequences. A gesture does not include its consequences, it obviously precedes them, creating a complex geometry of possibilities. Duchamp's "Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas" is one of the most important gestures of modern art. For, in its magnificent performativity, it may even contradict any possibility of modernity, being new and anachronical at the same time.

"Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas" was meant to be seen only after Duchamp's death. This gives it a particular importance in Duchamp's oeuvre. And it may be seen as a statement on what his legacy is about. Or on what Duchamp, himself, understands his legacy is about.

It's quite eloquent on Duchamp's understanding on how intelligence works. Given what you see, what you're offered to see, your mind is set on a journey, a kind of experience you're probably used to call aesthetic.

And it's quite interesting how Duchamp, who refused a retinal approach to art, so often dealt with sight, sight playing such a central role in many of his works.

Sight is an important data in his work. And in "Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas" there is even a hole for each eye, a way of materializing sight and stereoscopic vision in, probably, the most complex trompe l'oeil in art history.

And there is nothing more to see than what you see. Everything is cut to fit what your eyes reach and goes no further.

There's nothing more of the female body or the landscape, or of anything you see through the holes than what you see, precisely cut, having the same boundaries as your sight. There is no more of the things you see beyond what you see, literally. As though sight could cut reality, sharply. As though images were something that had material existence, objective and tactile if only you were allowed to touch them.

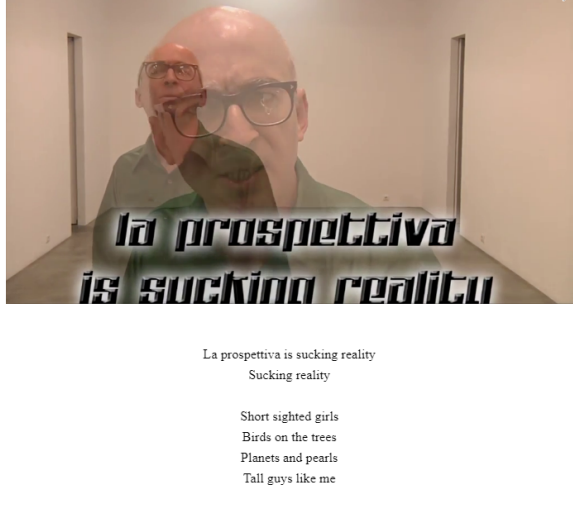
Given that magnificent artificial sight your mind wonders, trying to solve a problem that Duchamp, intentionally, just started to enunciate: "Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas"...

It's by following this idea, this duchampian idea of art or this duchampian awareness of what art is about, art as a construction of starting points, stimuli to mind, that I start by making what will probably be the first article of a series, where I reflect on my own work as an artist, or where my artistic work plays a central role on my seek for the understanding of the mechanisms of art and mind.

"La Prospettiva is sucking reality" (a series of paintings, a video and a song I made in 2010) crosses the boundaries, back and forth, between representation and reality. Probably in to realize it's impossible to determine where one ends and the other starts.

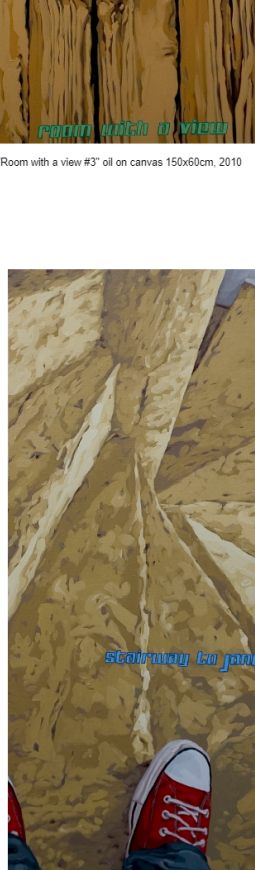
"La Prospettiva is sucking reality" is clearly a statement before it is a title. And a statement as a performative thing, something that is meant to be a starting point for action, intellectually and physically. For here, dealing with images, they are treated as things, things that can be sucked, eventually, to vanish or to go somewhere else.

The following texts are intentionally redundant to what's already in the paintings, song or video. But in this process, as often happens, redundancy generates other meanings, or reveals meanings that wouldn't be revealed if we were avoiding the obvious. Obvious is what we see. The awareness of the obvious generates an undetermined world that exists beyond the obvious, but needs the obvious to exist. The text about each painting is preceded by the word "Given" before each title, and though, each title as a gesture, a starting point for the mind to wonder, even if it wanders in a way complexity does not dismiss the idea of precision if we are able to admit there can be a place for precision in a multidirectional mind.



La prospettiva is sucking reality
Sucking reality
Short sighted girls
Barks on the trees
Plumets and pencils
Tall guys like me
Far far away is where I'll stay
Behind the sea a place for me
Goodbye my dear
Here is too near
Far away is where I'll stay
Down by the hill I won't stand still
I won't throw away my balls
I'll throw away my eyeballs

Lyrics: António Olaso music: João Taborda and António Olaso



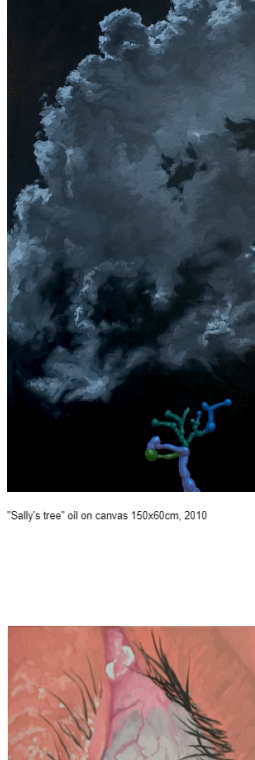
"Room with a view" #3 of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Room with a view" #3

("Room with a view" #1 and #2 belong to other series of works and have different conceptual scopes)

The front plane of the wooden planks emphasizes the flatness of the surface. But the title tells us it's a room. If there is room for us, it is in our condition of viewer. In the other hand, in order to believe it is a room, we must place ourselves inside it. Maybe it's enough to imagine a room in the space between us and the canvas and so, it just takes one step to get there. In the left upper corner (from the painting's point of view) there's a narrow opening to the outside world. And, through it, we can see a goat on the top of a mountain, the image of freedom in the open air. Eventually happiness might come along with it. ("The hills are alive with the sound of music...")

The wooden plane might be a wall or, more likely, may be part of a wooden box, not quite a coffin, but making us think of one. Our eyes experience the wooden barrier that stops us from looking further when we face it, or by looking at that opening, we feel the contrast between our condition and what we are allowed to see. And what we see makes us be even more aware of the narrowness of the space we're in. Eventually, this is a place that was meant for a single body.

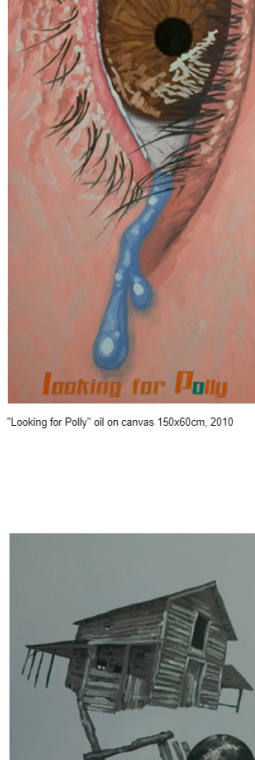


"Stairway to Jane" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Stairway to Jane"

The title tells us it's about a stairway to a person, not a stairway to a room. That stairway is the way to get to Jane, physically and, eventually, metaphorically, or even emotionally.

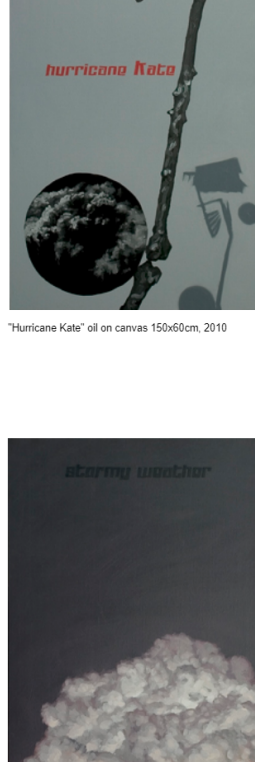
Here, the viewer might look at that foot on the stairs as if it was his or her own, and those stairs as though they were materializing the path you have to take to reach another person. And you don't know how many steps you need to climb, probably many, because it looks like you are climbing the steps of a cattle tower. Maybe you stopped to rest to be aware of the place you are in your way up, your tennis shoes showing how banal you are compared to what could be a hero in a romantic novel of knights and maidens.



"Sally's tree" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Sally's tree"

Instead of what could be a vast landscape, here we only see a tree, a tree made of ambiguous shapes, something between the representation of its branches and a structure similar to those we find in molecules models. It's a tree and, at the same time, it's an abstraction of the idea of an organism that might grow, eventually, to become something else. Its singularity is emphasized by the fact most of the painting's surface represents a dark sky with clouds. Clouds which shapes we know are constantly changing.



"Looking for Polly" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

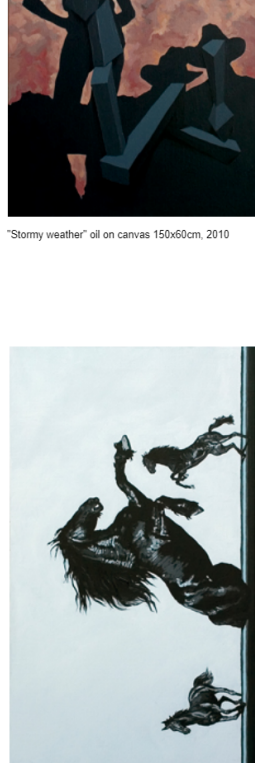
Given: "Looking for Polly"

In "Looking for Polly" we're led to think that it might be the painting that sees rather than us. For in the painting we see the close-up of an eye. An eye in that narrow vertical canvas, as though our sight had made a 90° turn. But tears falling vertically tells us that it is that eye that is in a vertical position, and gravity plays its role, making the tears drop vertically. And we're told that the eye that looks like it's looking at us is "looking for Polly". It is looking through us, seeking for Polly.

When we guess who Polly might be, maybe we think of a parrot not a person as most parrots are named Polly (Polly wants a cracker...). A colourful bird that can speak, not knowing the meaning of the words, but giving us the illusion that it speaks like we do.

But, being a bird, it might have flown away. If Polly flew away maybe the ideas related to the word Polly also did.

Those blue, monochromatic tears, even in their bright colour may miss polychromy or everything beside colours that is multiple.



"Hurricane Kate" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Hurricane Kate"

In "Hurricane Kate" we see a flying house. The title leads us to think it is the effect of a hurricane. A hurricane named after a person like all the hurricanes are. The image of the house flying intact dismisses any realistic approach (like Dorothy's house in "The Wizard of Oz").

And the terrible disturbance on the landscape (and on peoples lives) that hurricanes produce becomes something else than a catastrophe caused by weather.

Here we see a construction gathering different pieces of reality in a pictorial composition exercise. Even the sky is treated like a thing, a solid thing you might cut into different shapes to combine with other shapes.

All the coordinates seem to have been shuffled and reorganized in a new order that may ignore gravity and dismiss the way things are normally presented to our eyes. A site to which the laws of perspective don't apply anymore.



"Stormy weather" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Stormy weather"

Smoke is rising from below. The painting's title tells us it's about "stormy weather" but we see smoke instead of clouds, clouds made of smoke. Something is burning in the ground. And we call it stormy weather as though we're used to it, as though we could get used to violence, to war, destruction... And the silhouette of cowboys and cowgirls stand there, flat and still as though they belong to a scenario. But though they may belong a scenario, they face the smoke as though they're looking at it, as though they can really see.

Contrasting with the flatness of the figures we see the sculptural structure that holds them from behind. Much more complex than it was needed just for practical purposes, a manifestation of the self-consciousness of art and, at the same time, of the organic qualities of the things we build, potentially mutant and invasive.



"Cash, Sam and Zed" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Cash, Sam and Zed"

In the painting "Cash, Sam and Zed" we see a landscape, faraway hills below, leaving most of the space of the canvas to the sky. In the foreground we see a vertical black pole with 3 horses in different scales as black as the pole as tough they belong to it.

In this context of a series of paintings evoking perspective, this black pole presents itself as a kind of vertical alternative to a horizon, not only turning it 90° but also concentrating all the distances and scales, freezing all the movement in this vertical sculptural horizon. Even these stallions are still, but they are steel as sculptures celebrating their strength and dynamics.



"Wacky geometry" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Wacky geometry"

In the painting "Wacky geometry" we see the ruins of a house. Being a painting we can't help being pleased by its aesthetic qualities. But knowing it is a II World War photo, even the sculptural qualities of this ruin become quite disturbing.

Not even the details in colour the painting added to the representation of a black and white photo can mitigate the violence of war: red, yellow and blue, like in a Mondrian painting. But the surface of these ruins isn't flat at all and its materiality also goes much further than the limits of a canvas, bringing up memories not only of images, but also of things that really happened.



"Looking down" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Looking down"

The title "Looking down" may refer to where the person in the picture is looking at or, eventually, may refer to where the viewer, himself, is looking at. But the canvas is in a vertical plane as all the canvases usually are. We put canvases on walls not on the floor. And the viewer sees himself or herself looking down and looking forward simultaneously. A vertical plane that becomes a horizontal plane by the image it represents and vice versa.

The image point of view puts us in the place of the owner of those feet. We may see those feet as if they were our own. Puzzled also by seeing our feet standing on a pillow, we see our feet in the place where our head should be, our body standing instead of being laid down on those sheets.

And those sheets were unfolded leaving the fold marks like a grid in that plane, simultaneously vertical and horizontal, a grid that can hardly give some rationality to that ambiguous sight.

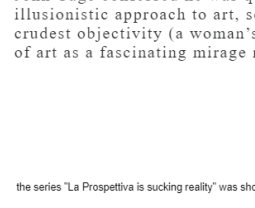


"Looking at Charley" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Looking at Charley"

"Looking at Charley" depicts someone who's looking at somebody else but, if we take it literally, it is also the painting that looks. The eye in the painting is looking sideways though the vertical canvas makes it look up. Or maybe this person is in a different place on earth, 90° degrees far from us. And so it puzzles us: we cannot be sure what is the direction the painting is looking at.

Its title tells us it is looking at Charley. It obviously is not looking at us. And we may find ourselves apart from that look, our presence ignored where all the attention is headed elsewhere. The painting is looking at Charley and we can only guess why.



"Broadcasting my songs" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Broadcasting my songs"

In the foreground we see two microphones tied to each other with tape. Their image is clear and sharp, near enough to our sight not to be disturbed by the fog. In the background we can see where they are, somewhere in the woods. We see some people there. Waiting for something to happen? Or just there, with the kind of mood people tend to be in woods, a kind of suspension of everyday life, not caring about nothing else than being there, the kind of feeling a closer relation to nature may give us.

"Broadcasting my songs" is quite a paradoxical title for this painting. How could my songs succeed to be broadcasted if no one is singing? Or is it that landscape a song? An image as a song, waiting to be broadcasted. At the same time we may share the melancholic pleasure that failure might give you, if you achieve to produce a poetic image of it.

"Christmas berries" of oil on canvas 150x60cm, 2010

Given: "Christmas berries"

These Christmas berries we can find in these trees, but probably only in this painting, growing like fungi in leafless trees, even leafless dead trees. They are meant to be cheerful, anyway, for they are Christmas berries, not any kind of berries. But we all know Christmas is such a happy Holiday it may become the saddest one if it fails to be as happy as it should. Nevertheless these berries give a fancy touch to this lifeless site, nonemotional and magical.

They are colourful glass dots that mark the space, eventually references we may take, landmarks for their perception. Exceptions that help us make some sense out of things; artificial beings that might help us find our way in the wilderness.

Exploring the conceptual possibilities raised by evoking "La Prospettiva" (here in Italian, reminding us of Giotto, reminding us of the extraordinary conceptual device he created in order to mime what we see, and the way we see) it's quite puzzling the fact that what was created to put the individual in the core of art is also an artificial construction that took a life of its own. And today we often see images taking the place of reality: surrogates that are often taken for reality in a reality made of images. But to say that "La Prospettiva is sucking reality" in the title of this series of paintings (and song/video), besides being a way of emphasizing the growing power of images, it is a celebration of the aesthetic experience of a place where image and reality have become the same. Probably it's another way of celebrating art by saying art is the place where reality is sucked into, eventually becoming something else (both art and reality).

John Cage confessed he was quite disappointed by Duchamp's "Given: 1 The Waterfall, 2 The Illuminating Gas". He was shocked by its illusionistic approach to art, something he believed Duchamp had helped art get rid of. Even if Duchamp had done it using the crudest objectivity (a woman's body made of plaster covered with pig skin, laying on a bed made of twigs), he recovered the idea of art as a fascinating mirage modernism apparently had left behind.