

Alberto Borea

El negro estuvo aquí (2008-2013)

(Negro was here)

Tribute Exhibition

14.11.2024

As part of the Malaga Gallery Weekend celebrations we are presenting a tribute exhibition to Alberto Borea (Lima, Peru 1971-2020). *Negro was Here* brings together a group of works that were part of three separate exhibitions put on by the gallery –*Ruinas y ciudades* in 2008; *Mountains of America* 2011 and *Turista El Dorado* in 2013– and individual submissions for Volta NY 2011 and ARCO 2013. Some of these have been generously lent for this special occasion by private collectors.

Borea's close friends nicknamed him Negro, a term used affectionately in some parts of South America. He himself used this title in some of his works like the *Mountains of America (Negro)*, from 2010 on which he inscribes the word on a snowy Vermont landscape in a performative action with a nod and a wink to Land Art. The allusion to himself and a certain sensation of how Latin-Americans art was perceived by some sectors of the population in the United States, even by the Black community. In 2011 the gallery took part in Volta NY with a lone work by Borea and other works shown in the video that were greeted with some controversy. I remember that when he discovered this he commented that this was all about white men with guilty consciences. And this was in fact true. And in fact, more than one Black buyer was interested in the work, including a famous TV presenter and nobody was feeling uncomfortable. Borea was using this gesture to carve a nickname with which he plainly identified in the snow and showed with pride and a good dose of rebelliousness. In large letters, in the space left by moving the melting snow with his foot, the artist left the mark of his presence as if he were mapmaking, and conceptually speaking, making this his territory;

Alberto "Negro" Borea also left his mark here. In this Malaga gallery he exhibited for the first time in Spain, twice later again and a third time at ARCO with works expressly created for the occasion. He has also exhibited, via this gallery at Hot Art, Basel in 2009, at Pulse NY in 2010 in a collective proposal, and, as we have mentioned in Volta NY in 2011 on his own. As director of the gallery it is with great satisfaction that I can say I have been a part of this artist's professional progress. At the end of 2013 our paths separated, not for the first nor the last time but I have followed his evolution and delighted in his many successes that would have been many more had he not died prematurely. He had only one other notable solo exhibition in Spain, at the Leyendecker Gallery in Tenerife in 2018. He did take part in a group collective at ARCO and in important Latin American galleries, with a selection of works at the Hoschild Collection in Peru which was shown at the Sala Alcalá 31 in 2017 and in the exhibition *Sincrónicas, Horizontes del Arte Contemporáneo Peruana desde el Coleccionismo* organised by the CIPO Fundación and Ella Fontanals Cisneros herself who has several of the artist's works in her collection that could have been seen at El Instante Fundación in Madrid 2019.

Borea's work is defined by continually using shifting medium and materials. The initiation of these medium define the development of his artistic proposal in which the moment and the history of the object take on a fundamental importance in the artistic discourse and its process. It emphasises the poetics of the objects as the prime access point. He uses the structural qualities of building tools, official forms, advertisements of real estate or weapons catalogues, combs, boxing gloves, matchboxes, VHS tapes and boxes, computer keyboards,

lattice-work, shopping or rubbish bags, shoe cleaners etc. Ready-made is his preferred medium for representation. He investigates the materiality of "the remnants of civilisation" and through these, the changes in society, the fragility of our economic model and the imminent arrival of its obsolescence. The common daily objects are treated as icons that hint at the general problems of art and the artistic object in relation to its perception, communication and circulation. For instance the piece *Huaco* (2013) consisting of mouldings and a cement mixer juxtaposes the past and the present; technology and simplicity, the global and the local; the native and the foreign, the personal and the universal, the authentic and the imitation, the primitive and the speculative related to their uses. Using this medium Borea recreates a poetic frame that hints at understanding the basic and spiritual desires of individuals and the quest for progress represented by the phases that a civilization experiences in order to survive and the part that chance plays in this development, as in the case of the piece named *Autopistas* (2008).

The artist's work brings together the difficult and dramatic relation between cultures and histories and the coexistence of past and present; great modern cities rising from the vestiges and ruins of the past. Imbricating his own experiences and scenarios he creates a framework based on different types of pieces and origins. Through his own personal iconography, he reclaims the preservation of cultural roots while at the same time denouncing –in a truly testimonial sense– the loss of oral culture and traditions for the sake of rapid consumption of the visual and the globalisation to which the mass media contribute unstoppably and irreversibly.

Borea reflects on identity and geography, developing a cartography that overlaps with his own experience. The choice of the map as a symbol of identity for each individual, people and culture defines Borea's work. He himself describes this practice as mapping his conceptual territories. All his work constitutes an intimate cartographic corpus that goes far beyond the personal since his circumstances are shared by millions of physically or culturally displaced persons. With collages, videos, objects or installations he wishes to awaken a social conscience about migratory movements from his own geographical origins to other areas that offer opportunity to improve the quality of life. The small pieces like *Skylines, Landscape of New York* (2009) and *Skylines, Latin American landscape* (2009) fall into this category.

Another example of this is the series of collages entitled, in a play on words, *Real State I* and *Real State II* (2010) –on view in this exhibition– in which he destroys information from a Real Estate agent in New York to create a series of "constructions", in sculptural paper collages. The real estate information is thus transformed into slum housing, new architectural spaces, some of which appear in gentrification processes as if they were a new distribution of power. Both are subtly involved in the deep changes happening to society in the USA by pressure from Hispanics; the growing Latinization since the 1980s and the politicization of ethnicity. Events of supreme importance have pushed hundred of millions of persons, often in unequal conditions or reciprocity, to conquer the barriers to their destiny, The large works *Heaven 1, Heaven 2* and *Heaven 3* (2010) with police cars trying to avoid, not always successfully, black storm clouds in which they are floating, continue in the line of this discourse.

The artist also considers the ratios of economic growth as another cartographic category; another scenario of North-South confrontation between wealthy countries and those that are still developing; between pre-industrial native cultures and market economies In a series of works made from materials taken from the Dow Jones stock market indexes, Borea creates mountains and architectural structures modelled on different archeological sites. From this material he collects information on the financial crisis, or if one prefers, from "economic ruins and landscapes" creating a visual metaphor on the fragility of power in the case of the polytych *Maine Mountains* (2011). In this series he not only demands the conservation of local communities, helpless before the globalizing hurricane but also tackles criticism of consumerism.

Borea's language conjugates contemporary international and his cultural and native roots. His

work reflects overcoming the cultural colonialism to which the outer confines of the Occident had been subordinated principally by Western Europe and the United States and also the aura of the exotic linked to local cultures of different peoples that brought the mainstream discourse together. His proposal is committed and conciliatory in the conflict of space sharing between past and present and between local and outsider. It goes beyond cultural, ideological, racial, social and economic barriers.

To some extent disdainful of finishes, he subscribes unquestionably to the Latin American conceptualism that Luis Camnitzer distinguishes from conceptual art as a phenomenon linked to the mainstream centre whereas the former, wider and more heterogenic is identified with diverse examples originating from the periphery and basically ignored and belittled by the representatives of the latter. This is closely linked to the culture and politics of the originating societies, something that does not happen in conceptual art and they make use of radically different objects to those seen by American pop artists and European Dadaists, constantly involved in a game that went further than amusement of greater or less content.

Likewise, information from the mass media treats their material as ready-made. This is certainly another crucial and indispensable agent of globalisation, raw material essential in the work of Borea's fellow-countryman Fernando Bryce of an earlier generation. The video sculptures *La estructura que observé desde el piso* (2012) incorporate videos from the series *Existe/Resiste*, a encoded chronicle of footage of various social disturbances that took place in 2012. Some led to the internationalisation of the Indigenous Movement, the Arab Spring and the miners' revolts in Bolivia and Peru.

As Ana María Guasch comments about the Brazilian artist Meireles, Borea uses the conceptual without abandoning the narrativity nor the metaphor, endowing his production with an individual and collective memory, revising the anachronisms and discontinuation of the historical discourse and the space-time relation, overcoming the central-peripheral dialectic and exotic folklore through globalisation and transculturality, the metadiscursive and intertextuality.

In conclusion, Alberto Borea's work is extremely complex because of the innumerable ramifications inherent in the subject and the enormous corpus he left. It is impossible to tackle it from hasty or simplistic points of view. The person is no longer with us but the artist remains with us through his works, his personality and for the life that comes to life every time his works are gazed upon, read and interpreted by each spectator, through the reviewers and the historiographers to whom it will fall to judge the transcendence it has in Peruvian, Latin American and universal art. If, at this moment he is in an extremely favourable position, I have no doubt that his work will gain an even more privileged place. With time he will reach his real dimension. And while this prediction might seem immodest, I have never been wrong in aspect.

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Translated by Diana Mathieson