

Patio A1

The aesthetic experience and the real experience

Ánxel Huete has never stopped painting, but it has been a long time since, in this commitment to reductionism, he ceased to use the brush in his work, resorting to tools such as sponges and fumigators to obtain flat, neutral surfaces which also eliminate any trace of authorship. The burden of entering into the work, of producing the meaning in these intervals that are generated in the reception space, of reading between the strata that are uncovered by the “Estructura da memoria” [Structure of memory] series (2000-2003) (large paintings whose anti-iconic bent suggests a denouncement of the invisible mechanisms behind the structures of power), lies with us — the author's demise give rise to the birth of the reader-spectator. The ideology underlying this series is once again reinforced by the titles, the guiding thread between the originator-work-recipient. “Memoria de Ruanda” [Memory of Rwanda], “Memoria de Dubrovnik” [Memory of Dubrovnik], “Memoria de Sierra Leona” [Memory of Sierra Leone]. Words which place us in a relational space, one of the dissolution between the personal and the political, or between the private and the public.

More recent series, such as “Invisible” [Invisible], “Causa subxace” [Underlying cause] or the homages to Pierre Bonnard (2002-ongoing), also depend on our attitude. The works speak of the existence of something hidden, under the surface, behind the painting. Huete revises the tradition of abstraction in these latter works, wherein the iconoclastic gesture reaffirms his critical position. The iconic referent disappears, but not the discursive aspects. It is in the discourse of concealment where the ideological character of his latest works resides, as “it is in the process of concealing where the process of the global society is to be found, where everything that is not visible does not exist”. This is how Huete summarises his approach to the real through abstraction, and through a process of self-affirmation and decoding which appeals to the intellect. An open oeuvre which generates meaningful fissures for the exercising of thought and criticism.

Gallery A1

The annulment of representative meaning

In Huete's work, the process of synthesis passes through monochromy, the opposite of the gestural. He seeks formulas to refer to the underlying existence, the loss of public memory, manipulation and obscurity: he hides, covers, conceals, masks, inters, buries, disguises and renders invisible. A process that will run for two decades, in series such as "Océano" [Ocean], "Albanería fina" [Fine Masonry] and "Ocultacións" [Concealment]. Huete arrives at the grid by eliminating all layers of representation, based on the renunciation (never fully consummated) of the iconic elements of painting. The alterations that appear on the surface of the canvas gradually transform the lines until they merge with the background, eliminating the duplication of planes and in dialogue with that underlying them. The "Reticulas" [Reticules], which he displays for the first time in the Galería Clérigos (Lugo, 1996), are the first of the works aimed at highlighting the disappearance of all trace of recognisable referents. He employs resources such as monochromy and contingency, intervening on the canvas but allowing it to be the process itself which provides the painting solution. There is no script or prior planning, but there is a clear desire to conceal the artist's presence. Huete waits patiently for the orthogonality (brought about the slippage of the liquid painting substance over the surface of the canvas, generating grids, reticules or sections which push the surface of the medium to a secondary plane) to become transparent.

In the "Ocultacións" [Concealment] series (1999-2000) he erases all representative meaning, with the painting superimposed over the presumed mimetic representation. Once again, the title generates a complementary setting, a displacement of the meaning: the series addresses the destruction of the past and functions as a criticism of the loss of memory leading to the destruction of identity. The pieces can be read as a comment on the media culture and the programmed concealment of public memory, on the annulment of the own by the imposed. Each work is a fragment of a larger, indefinite, series which works not as an intention but as a process. A sequence which transforms perception into performative experience, a deployment during which, in addition to the similarities (that monochrome green or yellow background), our attention is drawn to the differences, the accidents, the dark areas which Huete calls "pools of shadow". Processes of the de-standardisation of regularity.

Patio A2

Approach to monochrome

In 1993, in the Municipal Museum of Ourense, Huete presents a series of practically monochrome works, flat backgrounds on which geometric objects and minimal strokes are drawn. The “Aura de Chirico” [Aura of Chirico] series parallels the maritime references of the works in the “Océano” [Ocean] and “Naufraxio” [Shipwreck] series, works in which contingency begins to occupy a prominent spot, along with the purification which heralds the future disappearance of iconicity. A process of synthesis which coincides with the schematisation of symbolic elements, with chromatic reductionism as an indication of austerity, and with that approach to monochrome which situates these works as precursors of *brickie* painting. Huete starts to work with cement in a number of series which draw their inspiration from concrete walls on building sites. A change in the procedural and conceptual conception of painting can be perceived, leading towards a radical coldness, aimed at a firm resolve to conceal the hand of the painter.

Peripheral Gallery A2/A3

Brickie painting

In 1997, Ánxel Huete presents the exhibition *Man de cal/Albanelería fina* [Coat of lime/Fine masonry] at the Galician Centre for Contemporary Art (CGAC), in the Double Space, a setting which operated as a sort of badge of identity for the Galician museum in its early days. The proposal, a reflection on painting itself, is resolved with virtually flat colours, in chromatic sectors divided up into four parts by two orthogonal axes, formalising in the space the notion of wall painting and of *brickie* painting, an expression which Huete gleans from a poem by Joan Salvat-Papasseit which refers to the painting of a decorator and to the use of the tools and techniques of painters in the building trade. In this intervention organic and mechanical aspects are present, along with gesture and design. The traces of the painting process are shown in the gestural brush stroke and in the iconicity, forms based on sketches and notes made by bricklayers and technicians during construction, symbols destined to be covered over by other facings. Curated by the artist and writer, Manolo Figueiras, *Man de Cal* [Coat of lime] forms part of a series of “Albanelería fina” [Fine masonry] works, characterised by the use of flat colours and the disappearance of any recognisable trace of the artist.

Figueiras was the author who best interpreted the changes in chromaticism which marked the different stages in Ánxel Huete's painting — that transition from cold colours to more lively ones as a code with more than a hint of irony: both in the CGAC exhibition and in the works on display in this room, the use of a chromatic combination reminiscent of the German flag is a recurrent theme. A further homage to the Berlin of his formative years.

Gallery A2

Birth of the synthesis process

In Europe, the curtain is brought down on the eighties by a Documenta exhibition in Kassel (number 8, 1987) focusing on the functional integration of art. It coincides with the displacement of expressionism and the appearance of a new relational abstraction, one which reclaims ideology and the meaning of painted works. At this juncture, Huete was embarking on a process of synthesis which would result in the reduction of painting to zero, a process which got under way with a series of polyester resins painted in the summer of 1991 in the studio of the artist, Xurxo Oro Claro, in Allariz. In these works we can already make out two of the fundamental aspects of his work: the contemplation of painting as something which occurs on the surface of the medium, and the desire to reinforce the "brickie" effect, with an execution that seems spontaneous, using only one colour on the canvas, which serves as a background. These resources are recognisable in the "Fenicia" [Phoenicia] series, on which he will continue to work in parallel to the resins, and in which he also seeks the effect of "brickie" painting.

In the 1992 Casa das Artes exhibition in Vigo, Huete presents the "Fenicia" [Phoenicia] series and the resins, along with the sculpture *Cereixas* [Cherries] (a piece which functions as a sculptural extension of one of the resins painted in Allariz) and the painting, *Ulrike. Ulrike Meinhof*, a work which harks back in his student past in the Berlin of the RAF (Rote Armee Fraktion-Red Army Fraction) and, at the same time, pays homage to the poem that Méndez Ferrín dedicates to Ulrike in *Con pólvora e magnolias* [Gunpowder and magnolias]. The work brings to mind the dark death of Meinhof, through the use of light and black voids to evoke a cell, but, above all, through the title. Throughout Huete's career, titles operate as resources which situate the image in the setting of the real and give rise to a critical reading of the creative process, related always with social events and facts.

Patio A3

Gesture and the author's presence

Working in series, a methodology that Ánxel Huete will maintain throughout his career and one which accentuates the procedural and interrelated nature of his oeuvre, allows us to appreciate the progressive increase of gesture. During the nineteen eighties, he broadens his scale to approach human proportion and begins to lend importance to gesture as a programme of indexicality. This is a long, drawn-out trajectory over a number of different series until the nineteen nineties, when there is a shift in his work, as he divests himself of any personal physical footprint.

The nineteen eighties sees the appearance of series such as “Amigo” [Friend], dedicated to the painter Guillermo Monroy, who passed away in 1982 while Huete was returning from his second trip to New York. He employs iconic marks, as well as text (insisting on the relationship between referential object, pictorial setting and word), along with which appears the use of white as a support, an infiltration of the real onto the surface of the canvas or paper. The backgrounds acquire increasing prominence, a foretaste of future work, but remain on the same surface plane as the form.

In 1986, he starts working on the “Fellini” series, a meditation on reality and its reflection, and on stories within stories. In the 9th National Art Biennial in Pontevedra, he presents the diptych *Fellini due volte*, in which he extends his long brush strokes, which now run the entire length of the paintings. The cinema cameras are an allusion to Fellini's *Roma*, a film in which the production team improvised with shots of themselves during a traffic jam on the motorway on the way back from shooting for the film itself. Huete continues to work with a certain degree of gestural automatism.

In Baiona, where every summer Román Pereiro organised encounters between artists and writers at his O Toutizal country house (Baiona Horizonte Atlántico, 1988), Huete presents a set of mobile sculptures, exercises which hark back to his earliest experimentation with sculpture in Berlin, in 1970, and to which he will return at different times in his career. These pieces constitute a practice which is transversal to painting, with a certain degree of continuity over the decades. The large mobiles presented in Baiona are merely dialogues with the landscape around his studio, now in Domaio, on the Vigo estuary, opposite the shipyards and cranes of Vigo's cargo port. These are sober, monochrome pieces, a million miles from the expressionism of his earlier works. The origin of Huete's detachment from gesture can be situated at this point in time, as in the Baiona exhibition, in addition to the sculptures, he exhibits paintings that are virtually monochrome, hinting at problems such as repetition, seriality or scale, qualities of his later works.

Gallery A3

The debate on abstraction

When Ánxel Huete starts to paint, in the mid 1960s, the conventions of representation in painting have already been abandoned, and even the terms used for centuries to refer to it cease to have any meaning: painting is no longer illusionist, but flat, with no depth, owing to which the complementary opposition between background and figure no longer works as a resource. Painting is no longer autonomous, but full of impurities, linked to specific social and historical contexts, in contrast to the myth of abstract art as something pure and autonomous. Despite Huete's clear affiliation to abstraction, and his rapid abandonment of representative painting, the complexities underlying this affirmation cannot be disregarded, given the term's broad semantic scope. Thus, Huete's introduction to abstraction requires a semantic approach, since the artist sees no contradiction between sign and abstraction, and dialogue with the figure is a constant presence in his oeuvre.

Between 1975 and 1979, in series such as as “Xanelas” [Windows], “Chaves” [Keys] and “Recortes do espazo” [Space cuttings], on display in this room, we can make out a certain reductionism in forms, wherein the figurative or iconic referent (punishment devices, electric chairs, clamps) introduces that figure-abstraction dialectics, which will be a constant in Huete's painting and questions whether the figurative referents diminish the work's abstract nature. “The abstract meaning may possibly diminish”, explains the artist, “but only in that conventional, traditional and ahistorical understanding of abstraction. I'm quite sure I've always been working strictly within the sphere of abstraction and I've never considered the possibility of being understood in any other way”.

In 1978 he paints *A lousa de Franco* [Franco's tombstone], an anchor point with the real. The titles are always included on the back of works, along with where they are painted, linking them with the outside world. Throughout his career, they will be a key element which conditions the reading of works and unravels their meaning, setting them in a given time. The titles operate as appendices which help us to note similarities or differences, distancing, for example, pieces such as *A Lousa de Franco* from the forms and chromaticism of “Chaves” [Keys], the series to which it belongs: sequential forms which repeat a motif based on the popular game of *A Chave*, varying composition and colour.

Along with Román Pereiro, Guillermo Monroy, Menchu Lamas and Antón Patiño, Huete is discussing the need for reflection on a Transition which has to transcend politics. They formulate an ideology which will give rise to the exhibition *Atlántica. Últimas tendencias das artes plásticas en Galicia* [Atlántica: Latest trends in the plastic arts in Galicia] (Baiona), the first of five shows, of an innovative nature, to be held between 1980 and 1983. In Baiona he exhibits the “Surtidores” [Petrol Pump] series, a number of petrol pumps painted between 1979 and 1980, comprising a number of vertical elements repeated across the canvas underscoring the flatness of the painting.

Peripheral Gallery A3

Training: from Pop to abstraction

After studying in Barcelona between 1965 and 1968, in 1969 Huete arrives in Germany, where he abandons the expressionist ruralism of his early works, and where, after a trip to London, he starts to paint the caricatured figures of his pop series: priests and satraps portrayed with deliberate awkwardness and bound to real referents, also in their meaning. In Berlin he attends the Hochschule für bildende Künste (HFBK), where he studies until 1972, under Professor Hann Trier, who introduces him to the language of abstraction. He joins the exiled Communist Party and opts for "abstract realism", a term referring to an artistic practice of a Marxist nature which arises as a criticism of Stalinist Soviet realism. This will be a way of maintaining the ideological influence of Marxist analysis at a time when the spirit of European-American art is leading the way.

Art and ideology

In Berlin, to lead the demonstrations against the notorious Burgos Trial (1970), he paints large-format portraits of the prisoners on trial. He presents his initial abstract paintings in student group exhibitions in Germany and his interest in movement begins to shift from painting towards sculpture. In this year, he produces his first mobile sculptures, an undertaking he will return to on a number of occasions throughout his career, and he participates, for the first time, in what is the third edition of Open Air Art Exhibition in the Praza da Princesa, Vigo (1970), with an abstract sculpture (now lost, and a photograph of which is on display in this room).

Huete addresses abstraction in series such as "Ensaaios sobre a violencia" [Essays on violence], painted after his father's death in 1971, or in "Azuis xeométricos" [Geometric blues] (1974-1975), in which he moves on from movement to geometric rigour in order to explore the extensive sphere of visual representation beyond figurative representation. His approach to abstract realism, linked to the lectures attended in his Berlin period and his activism in the Communist Party, gradually dissipates after his return to Galicia, coinciding with his criticism of the party, which he leaves in 1977.