



DRAWING TIME

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ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN BY MARGARET LUTES

The fluid yet essentially controlled nature of the making of meaning in the English language has, with the verbal noun “wall drawing,” forged a term that does not translate into other languages. In fact, in the absence of prepositions that qualify the function of the verb in the present participle, ambiguity resides in this expression. The English word “drawing” is at the same time substantive (“a drawing”) and a verb in the present gerund, a verb that functions as a noun (“is drawing”). The expression does not define whether “wall drawing” refers to an action (drawing on a wall) or instead refers to a drawing on the wall or even in the wall; the wall in this case could be both a support surface and a technique. The term, if translated, would need a preposition that would clarify the relationship between the wall, the drawing and *il disegnare*, or the verb or action of drawing. Instead, the English term eliminates the subordinate relationship between support, project and object, and from there the term “wall drawing,” (action and work in progress) is the result of this same action—as one unique action: the significance gives birth to what is significant in a field of action, inside of which is the act of forging together with and reciprocating object and idea.

In order to block this ambivalence between support surface, the artwork and the act of working (on art), the subtitles of modern and contemporary art often reprise the structure of the controls. The subtitles limit the list of materials or the objects that compose a work of art without a preposition that doesn’t qualify the subordination to one or the other.

In this sense, it could be a question of semiotics: *Fontaine* by Marcel Duchamp should list in subtitles the name of the object (a urinal), the material of the object (ceramic), or if the single qualification of “ready-made” implies that the definition refers only to the action of the artist who transforms the object into a work of art.

Suppose one is in front of walls drawn by Iran do Espírito Santo, or, better yet, suppose one is internally inside of the parietal spaces in which the artist, by means of the parietal drawing, outlines the void in the topography of time. This work can be further defined as integrating the wall in its being. This semantic ambivalence, namely of the term “wall drawing” is in fact the root basis of the work of Iran do Espírito Santo. The work of Iran do Espírito Santo is, in fact, a paradigm of this identity between time, space and movement.

The Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica was a member of the Frente Group founded by Ivan Serpa following the 1951 Sao Paulo Biennale. It was a period in which Brazilian artists often confronted the European movements of Constructivism and Suprematism, which then united into the Neoconcretism movement that included the artists Sergio Camargo and Lygia Pape. In the years following, research on the nature of the object became crucial and was linked to the development of the historical influence of Mondrian and Malevich and their conception of “work of art in its entirety.” Oiticica, in the middle of the 60s, asserted that the group of artists which were part of this movement created neither painting nor sculpture but rather ambient installations. In this way, the artistic object became total. It liberated itself not only from the figurative obstacle in order to culminate in the absolute work of art envisioned by Malevich, but it also became liberated from the concept of distinctions between the work of art and superficial support surfaces.

The definition of the wall drawing, therefore, moves on its ambient relationship inside space and inside time, inside the moment in which the movement—that being, the gaze and the perception of the viewer—outlines its nature and

function. It aligns with a conception aligned with Espírito Santo that, perhaps today more than ever, manages to give an account of the “liquid modernity” of the contemporary world, as defined by Zygmunt Bauman, and prophesized in a 1973 science fiction film, *World on a Wire* by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. In the film, the characters are living in a psychotic state of solipsism in which internal and external worlds are confused and everything is perceptible and conceivable only through mental holograms. In such a hyper-sensitive world icon and original are one, the object becomes a sign of itself, obsolete without aging because it is contemplated without being used or experienced.

In a similar way, the spaces of Iran do Espírito Santo are only conceivable with the presence of the spectator in which topographies of mental space determine what is real is only that which is visible, and the visible is what is unreal.

A revolution in perception predated the Brazilian Neoconcretist movement to make this possible. It was during this period that the object could be recognized as something to define itself in a series of contextual relationships between the Self and reality.

In this phenomenological approach, one can also insert the evolved theory of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980), whose collection of essays, *The Psychology of the Child*, was published in 1966. According to Piaget, during a child’s growth, the construction of the real starts to cross the formation of the blueprint of their formation, as life experience, derived from the combination and accommodation of the motor sensory experience. In its earliest stages of life, the baby recognizes the permanence of the object, from which it conceives the abstract existence of the object in the absence of meaning and the absence of the signifier. It is a period when motor sensory intelligence and its concomitant “logic of the action” allows the subject to frame the structure of his or her own universe. The motor sensory intelligence “organizes the real building, transmitting the same functions, the largest categories being actions where there are the frameworks of the permanent object, of its space, its time and of its causality, substructures of future corresponding cognition... None of these categories is given in the beginning and the universe is wholly central on its own body and its own actions in an absolute egocentrism, as if unaware of itself given the absence of a conscience of the Self.”¹

Imagining that one’s initial perceptions are in a state of evolution, in which the Self attempts to construct a reality that it still perceives as an extension of itself, the wall drawings of Espírito Santo, those similar to the inconstant and holographic scenes of *World on a Wire*, could be read as fragments of the Self in search of a superficiality by which to signal the presence of time itself, more so than actual time. To travel across or through the wall, one’s evolving sense of perception looks for the trace of an absence in search of form. The void is highlighted by the fragments to suggest meaning.

Predetermining in advance the dissolving of the third dimension, of the mass (the meaning) in the surface and in the features (the sign) and transforming the wall from a support surface to a projection screen, the artists of the Neoconcretist movement got to the heart of the perceptivity question.

A foreshadowing, made in terms not without irony, but as a quasi-theoretical position, is the work of the Brazilian artist Regina Silveira, who had a strong influence on Espírito Santo. This occurred when they were students in their last semester of study at the Fundação Armando Alvarez Penteadó in São Paulo.

In Silveira’s piece *Abyssal* from 2010, the deep white abyss of Malevich evolves from the plane to become volumetric. The void is outlined by a wall painting which is punctuated by silhouettes of highly arched windows and columns, to suggest the viewer is floating within a cloister or perhaps a Renaissance palace. Like the Pazzi Chapel in Florence, begun by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1430, the use of black by Silveira (and the use of grey stone by Brunelleschi) models and articulates in a plastic way the architectural frames, while simultaneously establishing essential structure and signs. The two-dimensional style resolves the volume in superficiality. Equally, in pieces from the series *In Absentia*, presented at the São Paulo Bienal in 1983, Silveira projected onto a wall the shadow of objects symbolic of works by other artists: Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Pablo Picasso and Umberto Boccioni. By issuing this work, Silveira not only affirms the coincidence between significance/meaning and signifier, but suggests the incongruity of a perceived altered consciousness/knowledge of absence—of a space of cognitive action, objective and secular.

The most obvious association of Espírito Santo’s wall paintings to those by Regina Silveira is the reference to a phenomenological conception of reality, always implying the object as a source and outcome of perception and conception of reality. The resulting geometric forms are the artists’ theoretical actions not of a world freed of the object, much like the work of the American Minimalist artists, but the paradigm of cognitive structures can only be triggered and delineated in relation to the object.

This approach is similar in scope to the work of an Italian artist from the 1400s, Paolo Uccello. The stylized actions (not adaptation) of the figure on a single plane becomes the paradigm for the object’s geometry and the only conceivable shared reality by viewers. Uccello’s *La Battaglia di San Romano*, painted between 1456 and 1460, dislodges every representative and narrative intention not without an ironic outcome (and later reprised by Piero della Francesca). He realizes a pure projection on the plane, affirming that the only truth is that—the plane and the mathematics of its making, and not solely the volumetrics of the perspective. The true mathematics does not represent anything other than itself, a symbol only of itself. The work of Silveira is also not without irony, and does nothing other than affirm the truth of one’s perception, for which the sign also remains significant.

Undoubtedly the work of Espírito Santo also takes inspiration from his former teacher Silveira. But, with Espírito Santo’s work the geometry is procedure. The artist’s work is eminently empirical in semiotics, pragmatic rather than logical. If one compares the geometric plane from *La Battaglia di San Romano* by Uccello with *Parallel Forest*, the important wall drawing by Espírito Santo representing the geometric plane of the object, Espírito Santo’s *forest* proposes a pattern of vertical axes of a diverse thickness and painted at variant distance. Espírito Santo lends theory to the imagined real forest, that is, the line to the object and to its sign—in this case the tree—and indicates this from the weaving of hand engraved marks on the forest’s vertical bands of black paint.

The engraved gesture evokes the materialism of the object. Espírito Santo declares himself to be treating the surface, conserving the geometric structure in the purest sense of representing the wood grain. In many ways Espírito Santo restores it to the significant meaning and not vice versa. The tree is recognizable by means of the material, not by means of its most recognizable form. In this way, the geometry of the abstract becomes pragmatic and the theoretical underpinnings of the work are carried out in the real. It is used to determine the meaning, while the “drawing,” the action, the suggestive impulsion determines not *the* but *a* meaning. Not the form, but the weaving of handmade gestures and therefore the materialism of an object, means that the latter, although with each iteration becoming slightly different, albeit always itself, is always recognizable.

In his *Tractatus logicus-philosophicus* (1914–16), Ludwig Wittgenstein imagines the linguistic system like a system based on networks. Lattice patterns are applied on a white surface. Black irregular spots allowing each square to remain descriptive while they change according to the workmanship of the network. Therefore while structured the network is arbitrary because it is generated by one’s psychological necessity, and not a logical one, based on an objective reality. The order is given, not on account of things but by its subject.

This is the point that characterizes the work of Espírito Santo as work of a semiotic nature. It manifests itself in one part with direct pictorial intervention (e.g. from an handcrafted incision) by the artist on the wall, who then transforms it in a field of empirical action in which it forms the abstract concept of the painted object. Using the prevalent use of grey tones Espírito Santo transforms the meaning in a sign as in a “logo.”

The network of Wittgenstein would correspond therefore to a “pattern,” as previously implied. It is a pattern of workmanship designed by the artist, with an affinity directed into or inside the wall drawing such as the series *Chain Fence*. For as much as it can be subjective, these links are the possible contexts to outline the meaning of an object, of the real, while remaining in the void. Espírito Santo excels in this effort with an approach perceived as illusionistic and Neo-Baroque. In this sense, we can compare his glass pane wall paintings in the series *Déjà vu*. The series is aligned on a grid to represent rectangles of light as well as being iconized together with the object, the window, to which it allows itself to be perceived. This is reminiscent of *Shadow Line* by Silveira from 1999-2011, a vinyl adhesive piece applied to the wall beside a window in an exhibition space. In this case it represents the “black shadow” of (non)light cast through a window, a work that is designed with precision and expertly proportional to the space.

The black colour and the applied vinyl of Silveira's piece allows a symbolic valence to the form through the stylization and through the artifice rendered evident from the reproductive technique of the vinyl. In Espírito Santo's work, on the contrary, the shades of grey do not evoke an iconic time or ambience in absolute terms. Instead the gradations of grey evoke a flow of light, therefore time is contingent, moving, and empirical. Beyond the frame (which could be the frame of the work, or representation of the frame of a real window), is also painted the shadow of the wall on which the window stands out. Espírito Santo transforms the wall from the surface on which the symbol of the real is projected (as with Silveira) in the membrane to that of the flow of light, nothing more. The screen becomes a passage, a link (again the linguistic *network*) crossing and observing the beyond. In fact, in the wall drawing of Espírito Santo, the viewer could expect to be in front of the wall, or, inside of it. In this case, one could be in front of the window, or one could be in front of the reflection of a window imagined to be behind one's physical body.

If Uccello and Silveira joined forces to represent the visceral paradoxes they both convey, one could theorize how best to imagine the connection between idea (perspective) and object (figure). This hasn't happened yet and its why none of this field of action predicted by Piaget agrees with the abstract knowledge of forming itself through empirical knowledge. Espírito Santo, on the contrary, repositions himself in the theoretical and physical space in a decisive manner, and brings one back to the absolute abyss of Piaget's theory of the field of motor sensory actions.

In this sense, the mural and wall drawings of Espírito Santo do not represent the ethereal boundary between abstract and figurative. Rather, they represent the phenomenological apparition of the fragment of the process of how memory has traced time. One's absence is remembered from the void that we have left, and memory itself responds to a lost concept crossing over its fragments, like an epiphany, or as it has come to be recognized with a more technical term, pattern identification.

One may also compare the *modus operandi* of Espírito Santo to the engravings of Giorgio Morandi. The research of the artist from Bologna investigated the formal absolute inside the real object to beyond, that is to say from ordinary Constructivism or Neo-plastic.

Morandi produced engravings between 1912 and 1961, 131 etchings and dry points in total. In the etchings, as well as in the dry points, the firmness of the trace reveals the tonal qualities of the engraving technique. The pressure and the motion of the hand that presses on the plate (or, on the wall) is not only a technique. The work of establishing tones of light and shade/mezzotint require an artist to transform its absolute form—namely from the object inside its sign, in order that it becomes a paradigm and not representational.

Engraving on a picture plane (and likewise in the wood grain pattern drawing by Espírito Santo), transforms the support into context, into weaving, like the plate, an artistic object. The turning point in which object and memory can constitute an absolute sign is located in the quality of light. The gestural incisions in a wall drawing and in the singular tonal use of colour, light does not come to illuminate in the way Caravaggio or Bernini might use it. It is not based on a pre-existing reality but rather because of it. It is tied to the object. It can only arise from the quality of the engraving itself. The gesture therefore creates the space of time and only the light can render the gesture and make the contingent qualities visible.

The light of the Morandi engravings, like the drawings of Espírito Santo, allows the memory of the object in a temporal absolute to become a formal absolute. The wall drawings of Espírito Santo are not projections of abstract structures. Instead the work slowly takes shape and is often extracted with the aid of a group of assistants, not unlike a medieval or a Renaissance artist studio. This process does not represent a nostalgic return to hand crafts in a technologically advanced era. Rather, it affirms the performative quality of the gesture of engraving on the void. It will find its phenomenological contingency in the moment, as with viewing a façade by Borromini. It is made to flow and to glide, as on a transparent and elastic membrane. The light, and with it, the shadow informs the context in which its existence turns into presence.

The wall drawings of Espírito Santo are neither supported three-dimensionally nor screened directly on a wall. Although all are conceived on a unique plane, the wall drawings of Espírito Santo conceptually do not contain a frontal view. Instead, they follow the viewer's position, one's *Self* in search of a structure to aid perception, which itself

changes and moves together with the object that it observes. The viewer and directed perception together form its abstract concept, the sign.

In the empty spaces delimited by the perimetrics of Espírito Santo's drawings, whether in front of a wall or inside of it, there is a space for the experience of viewing. The *Self*, while not physically present, would reside there. Such presence lacks a literal reading and leaves only the impression between perception, action and object.

The mosaic is another manual technique, besides the gestural incision onto a support surface, that allows the plane to be engraved in order to allow light the possibility to construct forms. One can compare the traditional mosaic wall to that of a wall drawing conceived/conceptualized by Espírito Santo. Both techniques cross over their manual intervention to become structure itself, blending the work itself and the creation of it, with the result becoming a drawing. "Drawing" is understood to be a substantive/noun and action of drawing ("drawing" as a verb).

In the vicinity of the city of Rome, Espírito Santo has worked and lived intermittently for years. He regularly visits the workshop of Pietrasanta, in Tuscany, and realized that many of his sculptures could be reconceptualized by the artist and local mosaic artisans who have worked with traditional Roman mosaics from the end of the 8th-century and at the beginning of the 9th.

Early mosaic artisans moved away from the 6th-century style of mosaic, a goal realized in Ravenna in the magnificent wall mosaics in San Vitale and Sant'Apollinare in Classe. At Ravenna Byzantine illusionism cancels out the architectural space, bringing every type of colour to realize a rare quality of the medium, ending in a symbolic form. In Ravenna, the mosaic wall, as with the work of Uccello and Silveira, is a plane of projection, reducing the form to one of idea. The resulting work of art becomes the emblem of a theory.

Espírito Santo's wall drawings operate in a contrary manner, similar to the mosaics created somewhat later, in Rome in the 9th-century. A magnificent example is the *Sacello de San Zenone* in the Roman Basilica of Santa Prassede, which the artist and I visited last year. The luminous screen is a structure in which the object and surface are outlined not as one on top of the other, but as one inside of the other. The figuration coalesces with the architectural form and forms the support structure. In a similar manner, Espírito Santo's wall drawing entitled *Axis*, constitutes the apparition of the orthogonal structure becoming also the shape of the cross. Structure and figure, significance and sign recognition come together for a moment, an epiphany perceived from the absence of formal meaning.

Light and the visualizing of light, both traditionally religious and secular, define aspects of the perception of the real. In his youth, Espírito Santo spent years working in a photographic film processing lab. The experience informed his idea of the *camera chiara*, a space of sudden light which flares and begins to burn gradually and visibly for some time before being absorbed and burnt away entirely. The remaining fragments become the pattern, the *déjà vu* of the object associated less with the illuminated exposure. It is literally the link, the weaving and the material on which the light is stabilized here and now before it fades for the last (or, the initial) appearance of the sign.

The Baroque of Caravaggio and of Bernini, like the work of Regina Silveira, plastically and physically appropriates space, going on to create the illusion of a three-dimensional sculpture, on to which the light can be projected but not emanate from it. They remain, therefore, essentially tectonic and representative of another dimension.

For both Borromini and Espírito Santo, everything is enunciated inside and not on the surface. The Prospettiva Borrominiana (1653) of the Palazzo Spada in Rome features a profound quality on its first plane that does not have room to visually flow any further. Antithetical to this celebration of plastic modelling is the colonnade by Bernini of Piazza San Pietro, the Prospettiva. In general, the Borrominian walls, both externally and internally, as in the Chiesa de San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1634–44), are elastic membranes on which the sign stands out, etched as if on a plate, from concave to convex, and are fields of resistance. The light flows and remains clotted without representing, in chiaroscuro, the resolution of space over time.

As with the Borrominian walls, the wall drawings of Espírito Santo are recto-verso, a membrane for time that can only manifest itself inside its contingency, in the coinciding of light on an object, real (in the sculpture) or evocative (in the patterns of the wall drawings). Always impassable and never tectonic, the wall drawings of Espírito Santo are a semiotic opportunity to assess apparitions. They are intelligent signs by virtue of the line of light which remains

congealed, in the process of structuring itself and never becoming edified. They move with the eye through which the process of looking becomes alphabetized to elicit a form of literacy. The wall drawings of Iran do Espírito Santo are a paradigm of this phenomena of memory. The viewer does not find himself or herself in front of a staged scene, but, rather, the eye travels across a space which the viewer activates at the same time.

Inside the optical analysis adopted by the viewer to compensate for the *shock* of colour—à la visual *shock* colourists such as Ellsworth Kelly—some Italian artists between the 50s and 60s examined the same visual territory. For example, Mario Ballocco, Mario Nigro and Luigi Veronesi examined our visual system of intermediate colours and how the median reconstructs or redirects the perception of viewers to create the equilibrium and the symmetry of the field. This adjustment complements the act of the eye to register major and minor colours and to eventually equalize the context of the object displayed as the basics of Gestalt psychology.

Utilizing all possible shades/nuances of white and black (or neutral colours like the clearest green of the glass or the earthy brown and almost quasi-sepia of boxes of cardboard), Espírito Santo incorporates up to 56 shades of grey for a wall painting to resemble rows of brick that can fade from view within the parameters of the frame of viewing. The wall painting entitled *Extension/Fade*, conveys a semiotic statement and therefore paradigmatically shifts not only the structure of the fragment, that is, the pattern, but also the modality of the visual process. The motor sensory process across which the eye focuses or loses sight of the observed and implied object, engraves on the mind an implied plane to complete the memory trace.

In this sense, the wall drawings of Espírito Santo are solidified by a defined aura of perspective already addressed by Leonardo da Vinci and intended to inform his paintings. For da Vinci, the void had a non-colour which he translated as the atmospheric consistency between subject and object. The artist translates that prospective emptiness as matter in temporal membranes which coagulate, transforming in this way the space in time as part of the visual whole. The works presented for the Illingworth Kerr Gallery exhibition are each an example of that conceptual vision.

In *Left Wall/Box* from 1996, the enunciation is direct and programmed. The outline of the drawing announces an object (box) while the engraved medium indicates another (wood). The viewer, however, may perceive a cross, then between form and medium the eye may prefer the second formation, that being an abstract concept of the object. This wall drawing apparently references the vertical cross of Malevich from 1913 (collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam) entitled *Basic Suprematist Element*. Both works refer to an object, a cardboard box in the case of Espírito Santo, and a Russian icon, the cross, from the 12th-century, in Malevich's case. However, what is indicated in the case of Malevich is a reduction of the object to its essential lines that would dissolve everything in a Suprematist composition. Espírito Santo's piece however is the manifestation of ambivalence between sign and object. The objects, that is to say, the cross, and the box, suggest the geometry is a prototype and type at the same time, theoretical in virtue of its reality and not in spite of its reality.

This revolution, separated by almost 100 years, refers to the visual confusion of a 21st-century's spectator, whose viewing process melts overlapping planes of pure projection. The spectator no longer distinguishes between object and image, which again is the basis of Espírito Santo's research, but not the ultimate goal.

If it is the medium and not the form that qualifies the perception of the fragment in a recognized object category—in this sense the confusion object-model finds one of its apexes in the Formica-based sculptures of the American artist, Richard Artschwager. However, for Espírito Santo, the question is not limited to pure spheres and boundaries perceived or historic, but also its phenomenal range. Although the gesture of Espírito Santo constitutes repetition, from a minimal operation, there is nothing minimalist per se in his work. The artist is not intending to liberate or liberate himself from the object, but instead he intends to restore not so much its form as its capacity to initiate memory and to delineate, like a meridian, the time, the passage through which light is simultaneously on the subject and on the object.

The artist does not stylize the object in order to reduce it to its essential lines. In a world in which the object of consumption can no longer be consumed, and becomes obsolete without aging or perhaps without being used, the logo for Espírito Santo, the uncut or unused pattern is more realistic than the object we imagine in reality.

The aesthetic action of consumption transforms the ordinary object into an absolute form, divorced from time and aesthetically it achieves a new attribute. It becomes *adequate* when assessing the invariability of contemporary immobility, so that we view it abstractly, as viewers as well as active consumers.

The texture and therefore the light, as well as the form of the painted object allows the concept to form itself. This is also proven to be a curious phenomenon frequently experienced by the public in front of the wall drawings of Espírito Santo. Viewers often approach the wall drawings in order to verify whether it is real or artificial.

That occurs because viewers are used to looking without testing or experimenting even a little. Most aren't asked to imagine an object linked to language (in terms set by Wittgenstein), to define itself for use or contemplation. But it also happens because Espírito Santo is going further than preceding generations of artists by replacing the reproduction of the sign with the reiteration of it. This allows his work to not be abstract and purely iconic, but instead to push the slight imperfections, which exist in the hand-built making of painting and drawing. Such imperfections introduce the spectator to the illusion of the drawing. By virtue of their connection with a shifting reality, what is constituted from the manual execution of the work and the time this entails, the illusion comes directly from the context in which the work had been created. The context disregards the contemporary perception of reproduction of the real and discounts the original derived from nature/life.

In *Corner/Entrance-Exit*, also from 1996 and created at the Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago, Espírito Santo develops a structure of existing exposed space in the form of an existing angular pillar in the gallery. The drawing remains intrinsically tied to the contingent space, without cancelling it or dissolving it, as if it is an absolute geometrical work of the Minimalists, or offers the illusiveness of a Byzantine mosaic in Ravenna.

As viewers, we can compare once again the pragmatic approach of Espírito Santo to that of mosaic builders active in the region of Rome in the 9th-century, and the Byzantine and Paleo Christian mosaic workers in preceding centuries. Each was eager to recreate an ideal space based on the correspondence between numbers and proportions which went on to permit a modality based on practicality and individual expression (of the hand-made). The *magistri comacini*, as they were called in the 9th-century, migrated to Rome from Lombardy at the end of the 8th-century. They developed an empiric architecture, following the procedure of the practice and constructive demands. A prime example of their work is the church of San Pietro in Tuscania in the Latium region. The church did not reflect a preconceived idea, but rather a project based on the concrete need of the void to be filled, and the weight requiring support. The procedure therefore, the sensory motor field of Piaget, the making, the action itself, implies and develops the idea from a pragmatic linguistic context rather than a pre-existing idea.

In a similar manner, in the work of Espírito Santo, light is not platonic. It does not dissolve the wall structure, and the figure is not the icon of an ordinary object. Rather, Espírito Santo creates both the sign and the drawing. The two do not coincide in the moment in which the perception created by the artist lets them exist in scale, *at* the wall more so than *on* the wall. This follows the Latin use of the preposition “ad”, which indicates the motion in space and time, and not the location. So, the pattern becomes the object. In *Corner/Entrance-Exit* for example, the model defines the object. In fact, the word “plaid” indicates both the cover or woven rug with its typical Scottish design, and also the fabric itself.

In the artwork *Accumulation* and in *Backwall/Rest*, the artist paints transparent squares as if re-imagining ethereal panes of glass, superimposed or of diverse consistencies. They appear as transparencies and generally speaking the public falsely thinks it is a real window. They convey once again in semiotic terms and not naturalistic terms his phenomenological vision of the cognitive process. Eliminating every source of real or true light, Espírito Santo from here on recreates an artificial one—not absolute and ideal but *as if made* natural and contingent.

Again, strength of vision is located in the vicinity of the etchings by Morandi, who aimed not to represent the forms underlying light, but rather the light underlying the forms, within its emptiness and fullness, its signs and lines.

At the 1999 Venice Biennale for Visual Art, Espírito Santo decided to take to the extreme his research on texture and object. He presented an installation in glass. The plates of glass took the appearance of many, diverse and stratified panes while in reality the work was achieved in the fabrication of one unique piece of glass assembled with diverse

patinas and finishes (from mirrored to sand blasted). Once again the medium qualified the three-dimensionality of the object, its reality and its nature. The network of Wittgenstein, in the form of textured and patterned material for Espíritu Santo, determined a new diversity in significance.

It was the first time that a wall drawing involved a sculpture. The reproduction for Espíritu Santo anticipates the original. If the picture in history has always attempted to represent the third dimension as real, the third dimension then is trying in every way to find a reason to exist separate from its own icon or sign.

Extension/Fade, the series of wall drawings to resemble brick walls in grey tones was first shown at San Francisco MoMA in 1997. In a sense, Espíritu Santo recovered the exterior walls of the Mario Botta designed gallery, in fake bricks. The piece does not alter the building structurally. Rather, the artist again evoked the ambivalence between object and sign. His bricks, in a graduated scale of grey were painted on strategically chosen interior walls surrounding the elevator doors. They immediately became icon and object at the same time, literally, metaphorically and semiotically because they are anti-naturalistic thanks to the use of white and black, the colours of memory and of typography. Also interesting in this case was the reaction of the public, which did not see the work because the bricks were where they should be on the walls structurally supporting elevator shafts. The wall reflected the identity between signifier and signified. The artist presented museum walls and an artwork simultaneously, different and always the same, the same and always different. The space was transformed in time.

Bereft of dimensional profoundness, time has taken possession of our faculties in defining the real. *Nostalgia*, the film from 1983 by Andrej Tarkovskij, features a series of windows reflected in a wall painting, similar in appearance to Espíritu Santo's *Déjà vu*. Light defines its dimension.

In the film, white and black are drawn as vague colour reflections on green-tinted glass bottles in order to hint at coloured waves, dreams, reality and memory. All are blended in a plane of space, where everything is flat and accessible. In the final scene of the film, the protagonist, now dead, finds himself sitting on the ground like an old icon framed between three arches of an abbey in ruins (the Tuscan ruins of San Galgano from 1288). The protagonist is transformed back into an icon, framed in an empty and emptied architecture, transformed from time into a theater stage. A stage which is deprived of volume, fragmented into signs of a lost tectonics, like the windows of *Déjà vu*, or the Gothic arches, sculpted linearly on the gold background of *Annunciazione tra i Santi Ansano e Margherita* by Simone Martini from 1333. The background or contour lines suggest a reality or reflection, a history or an epiphany. The present time is made visible and representable only in our absence and in the dissolution of our volume.

Untitled (Tape) is one of a series of rare wall drawings in which Espíritu Santo uses colour other than shades of grey. The fiction is formed from the fact that a square is represented on the wall and parts of the square are more obscure and darker where the two end strips of “adhesive tape” are painted, as if superimposed, one strip on top of the other. The obscured square is painted apart from it, with a darker colour. The volume, therefore, is not represented by a real depth derived from the excess of two layers of paint. Rather, everything happens on a unique single plane. This calculated flatness and two-dimensionality of time without chronology, is of a time both visual and perceptive. The square of intersection is but an obscured square, not an intersection derived from having superimposed two layers. Certainty of meaning is dead, cannibalized by the imagination. The work becomes again an icon of a reality that the vision no longer recognizes. Only the light, modulating the texture of the colour for the eye, suggests the object.

Various works by Espíritu Santo may appear more abstract. For example, *En passant* manifests itself in a more ethereal form, its idea of the concept of the real is an interference and epiphany between light, field of action and look or glance.

In a version of *En passant* in which the grey hue is yielded in a vertical direction, one is forced to perceive or mark the path of the space mentally and physically in graduated stages. If in a version of *En passant* the dark shades of grey run horizontal across a wall, the induced perception causes the viewer to stay firmly in place, and guides the look/glance towards the top. The shade represents once again the cognitive process in the delineation of the space crossing over perceived time. The direct gaze or peripheral glance activates the light, which in turn activates the modulation of its emptiness or fragmentation. At the same time light activates the possibility for the emptiness to appear and activate the look.

Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciazione* from 1472-1475 is notable for its so-called *wrong perspective* (other noted *mistakes*: the arm of the Virgin is elongated). According to Antonio Natali, Director of the Uffizi in Florence, the perspective was not a mistake owing to the youthful abilities of Leonardo, but on the contrary was the artist who determined how the work would be viewed in perspective from the right. If this were true, such a work anticipates the Baroque trompe l'œil which displaced perception and substituted *the truth* with the artificial. Leonardo would have instead translated his aerial perspective in terms not only of space but also of time. He contemplated the distance between viewer and object whereby he imagined the motor/physical distance in the space of that relation between viewer and artistic object.

In this sense of freedom of reading which the artist permits for viewers, *En passant* could be considered an homage to the aerial perspective of Leonardo. For both artists there is an agreement to paint, without formal representation via the emptiness and its density.

In *Line and Shadow*, Espíritu Santo takes the possibility of the form to the extreme. He stops at the preceding instant in which form dissolves itself, backing up to the point in which form takes shape for the viewer. It is a Morandian axiom of the formal absolute in this work taken to the limit of the ethereal with the solidity of the object intact as sign. If the icon precedes the object of which it is a paradigm, the thin line and the line that is a bit thicker (which the artist defines as a “5 mm thick rectangle”) can be a reflection/reflex of the other one. Which is the reflexive form, which one is more visible and which one is on its way to dissolution? It's up to us to determine the answer.

Espíritu Santo has in fact put a plot, an aerial perspective, between our regard for viewing and the void or emptiness. In this emptiness light comes to be rendered visible and conjures a presence which is essential, like both a stumbling block and a biblical corner stone. Thanks to the epiphany of the vision, light becomes a place and finds its *genius loci*.

The French poet Saint-Pol-Roux (1861–1940) was considered a predecessor of Surrealism. In his article *Cinéma vivant* from 1930, he predicted the passage of the dark room of the cinema to that of the whiteness of one's own mind. What is written in the first pages of his book reflects the eminently lyrical and contemplative work of Espíritu Santo:

*The time of the movie poster, of the relief of the actual cinema, will end. Left to look on the wall, man will want to move behind it in order to know and experience the image that he has seen from the front... Man wants to turn around, to admire, to touch, to know and experience totally that which until now he has only been allowed to see superficially. The image becomes relief, therefore, equal to the man who walks around it.*² •

1. Piaget, Jean. *La psicologia del bambino*, Bärbel Inhelder, Einaudi, Torino, 1970, p. 20

2. Saint-Pol-Roux. *Le cinéma vivant*, Rougerie, Mortemart, 1972, p.16

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