

Horacio Zabala: crossing out

Horacio Zabala's exhibition at Henrique Faria gallery, entitled **Between the lines**, can be understood from the act of crossing out.

If writing –as Thot, its inventor, wanted– aims to preserve memory, what is the purpose of crossing out? What happens when writing is hidden? Do we challenge what we remember, do we censor a message, delete an act of communication, establish a new type of writing that no longer serves to memory but to oblivion? Horacio Zabala removes all the negative connotations from the act of crossing out only to place it on a plane of invention. Crossing out and creating are, in his work, a single, indivisible gesture. And that triggers at least three processes: crossing out as sensory manifestation, as research about censorship and as affirmation of the monochrome.

Writing, which in these works is the origin or starting point, is hidden. It is in books, but books that cannot be opened. It is in newspapers, although in words and numbers that do not allow them to be read. It should be on spines, but all they offer to us are red monochromes. At the same time, the hidden writing is the scaffolding of the work: it regulates the play of lines, imposing its limits. Zabala's first action is to go –with his crossing-outs– from the legible to the visible, from writing to color. The mark makes us see something and, in the same gesture, makes us see what cannot be thought of: it gives visibility to the unintelligible.

This game of deletion and concealment suggests censorship. Even more so since it is known that Zabala has participated in the political arts of the seventies and lived abroad during the last military dictatorship. Mario Perniola, who read his work under the psychoanalytical notion of censorship, said that the artist "suppresses everything with a radical determination" and "operates the negation of negation" because, in newspapers, silencing and disinformation mechanisms are already in place. Is revealing the mechanisms of censorship –the Italian critic wonders– an attempt to regenerate art? Zabala's answer is twofold: political and existential.

From the political point of view, his works remove us from the environment but they never forget it. The environment is always there: crossed out and, for that very reason, visible. The titles of some of his works evidence this by recovering the dates from the newspaper inspiring them: *La Nación, jueves 14 de julio de 1988* (La Nación, Thursday July 14, 1988) or *Le Monde Censurado - Bourse de Paris 24-11-93* (Le Monde censored - Bourse de Paris, 11-24-93). There they are, like indications of a specific day. That moment

takes us to others: it is impossible not to think of the colorful lines crossing out the Paris Stock Exchange records in relation to the current dominance of economics and with a language –that of financial indicators– that we barely know how to read, one that has, however, such great influence in our lives. That is the contextual and, if you will, political reading: the censorship mechanism speaks of memory, but also of complex instances of unintentional or deliberate oblivion. It reveals legibility problems and entails a visual resignification. The art machine must process both memories and oblivions, memories being what has been repressed or deleted. By crossing out, Zabala shows the various aspects of censorship.

The existential response does not deny the political reading, it rather magnifies it from a different perspective. In Zabala's work, crossing out also leads to a greater helplessness, such as his prison layouts or mathematical calculations. Prison not only means power repression, it also alludes to human precariousness. In addition to the cancellation of reading, the wordless library also means an opening to other human activities: to look, sort, file, incorporate what has been read. The obsession about a newspaper page exceeds irony on financial jargons only to become an adventure of color and invention. In short: Zabala's monochrome is existential, an ultimate testimony where the crossing out conceals as much as it reveals, where the sensitive and the conceptual gather at the very moment they become separated.

Horacio Zabala produced his early works in the sixties: unlike other artists who gradually moved toward conceptual art, Zabala was born conceptual. A trained architect, Zabala's preliminary projects are as important as the work itself: they are all transformations of an artistic sensibility that unfolds, a thought created by images. Hence the importance of this exhibition: in monochrome libraries, in newspapers works, in red variations, the viewer (a reader of signs) can accompany the processes of a dynamic art that, by way of color and shapes, makes us aware of the acts of writing, censoring, crossing out, drawing, planning, composing and incorporating an object into the world.


Gonzalo Aguilar

Horacio Zabala was born in Buenos Aires in 1943. He became an architect in 1973 but has been devoted to plastic arts since the mid-sixties, a practice he continues to our days. Since then, Horacio Zabala has produced works of experimental risk and dense theoretical reflection associated with conceptual art. In 1967 he held his first exhibition at Galería Lirolay and, in 1972, he participated in the *Arte e ideología CAyC al aire libre* exhibition with his work *300 metros de cinta negra para enlutar una plaza pública* (300 meters of black ribbon to put a public square into mourning). "Art relies on what is not art," he writes in the catalog. During the seventies he became a member of Grupo de los Trece and, in 1973, he presented *Anteproyectos* (preliminary projects) at Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAyC), exhibition in which he worked with different media and took architectural design to the realm of fictional and intellectual speculation.

In 1976, Zabala moved abroad and lived for 22 years in Italy, Austria and Switzerland. From this period, it is worth mentioning *Refugio antiatómico* (fallout shelter), in which he continues with the claustrophobic imaginary constructions that allow him both to reflect on catastrophes and make, in his words, "a socio-aesthetic operation." In 1997 he made *El arte o el mundo por segunda vez* (art or the world for a second time), a work conceived for the Internet, which a year later led to a book published by Universidad Nacional de Rosario. It is not the only theoretical book written by Zabala: in 2000, Adriana Hidalgo Publishing releases *El arte en cuestión* (the art in question). He coauthored *Conversaciones* (conversations) with Luis Felipe Noé and, in 2009, he published *Vademecum para artistas (Observaciones sobre el arte contemporáneo)* [Vade mecum for artists (Comments on contemporary art)] edited by Asunto Impreso. His latest book is *Marcel Duchamp y los restos del readymade* (Marcel Duchamp and the remains of readymade), published by Editorial Infinito in 2012.

Zabala has participated in numerous group exhibitions (*Los Encuentros de Pamplona*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1972; *Ends of the Earth: Art of the Land to 1974*, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012; *Monocromos* at Centro Cultural Recoleta together with Eduardo Costa and Marcelo Boullosa) and several individual exhibitions such as those held at Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (1998), Fondo Nacional de las Artes (2002) and MUNTREF (2013). In April this year he will open a retrospective exhibition entitled *La pureza está en la mezcla* (purity is in the mixture) in Colección de Arte Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat, exhibition which

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 will be showcased during the second half of the year at the Phoenix Art Museum.