

EXHIBITIONS

93. *Tiempo real (real time)*, by Jorge Macchi. 2007. Silent colour video, 24 hrs. (Courtesy of the artist and Ruth Benzacar Galeria De Arte, Buenos Aires; exh. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles).



outcome. Existing conventions of aesthetic judgment are scarcely adequate for assessing moments of natural expression that an artist has co-opted in this way. It makes little sense to discuss the consistency of the spider's web or the monotony of the mosquito's hum, even though they are intrinsic to the works they shape. The difficulty of calibrating judgments in relation to projects of this kind reveals a great deal about the pace of evolution in contemporary art.

Much of that rapid development stems from the sheer glut of material and antecedents available to a working artist. Previous iterations of the themes in this exhibition pop up explicitly or implicitly, often turning the artist's attention inwards. This is less self-regarding than one might expect. Paul Sietsema's 16 mm. film *Anticultural positions* (2009; no.43), which he produced as a substitute for an artist's talk, draws heavily from Jean Dubuffet's 1951 lecture of the same title. Adapted passages of Dubuffet's lecture appear as intertitles between black-and-white stills of Sietsema's residue-encrusted worktables. The result is a hypnotic combination of concentration and distraction, less about the preoccupations of one artist than about the creative psyche. Frances Stark's witty collages examine the mundane anxieties of daily life in her studio, while Dianna Molzan dismantles the constituent elements of painting with the help of notable challenges to the medium in the past. In *Untitled* (no.20; Fig.91), she tests Jackson Pollock's gestures and Lucio Fontana's incisions to elegant destruction. There is, however, no sense that Molzan's challenges to the medium propose anything more than a sustained examination of the way painting works as a medium in the aftermath of earlier, more determined challenges. She shows what painting is rather than what she thinks it should be.

The general absence of hectoring injunctions to see things in a particular way reinforces the sense of porous receptiveness that characterises this exhibition. It is not surprising that several of the projects involve recycling. Gedi Sibony carefully arranges reclaimed building materials and found scraps in a conversation with the spatial setting, re-using and moving this material within an installation and from

one project to another. Sergej Jensen uses all manner and conditions of textiles to make his paintings, which are full of imperfections that confer great formal complexity. Recycling, itself a process of material transformation, lends itself to moments of artistic conversion. It also indicates the capacity to accomplish a great deal with modest means, a virtue appropriate in the present climate. Most of these artists have produced their works with impressive economy. Jorge Macchi's painstaking video *Tiempo real (real time)* (no.19; Fig.93), for example, which tells the time with a display formed from matches, is a marvellously subtle treatment of a grand theme with the slightest of resources.

Two works in the exhibition refer to episodes in Soviet history. Ian Kiaer's *Melnikov project, silver flower* (2010; no.14), a careful arrangement of discrete wall panels and pseudo-architectural obstacles, took as its inspiration the house and studio that Konstantin Melnikov built for himself in 1929. Melnikov remained in that house for nearly half a century, marginalised after the rise of Stalin but mostly ignored rather than persecuted. Kerry Tribe's film about the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, *The last Soviet* (2010; no.56), focuses on Sergei Krikalev, the cosmonaut who was aboard the Mir space station at the time. Points of view, narrated voiceovers in English and Russian, and the languages of the subtitles switch back and forth in a superb allegory of intentional and unintentional misinformation. The Soviet Union remains a rich source of cautionary tales about the gap between aspirations and reality, and about the limits of control over microcosmic and macrocosmic affairs. History has not been kind to ideologies, including the market fantasies which have hobbled the world's economies. The creative humility in evidence at the Hammer is a timely reminder that quiet accomplishments are more substantial than grand dreams, and that doubt is much less fragile than certainty.

¹ Catalogue: *All of this and nothing*. By Anne Ellegood and Douglas Fogle, with contributions by John Cage, Charles Long and Corrina Peipon. 188 pp. incl. 80 col. ills. (DelMonico Books/Prestel, Munich, 2011), \$30. ISBN 978-3-7913-5126-1.

Painting in the Hispanic Kingdoms

Madrid and Mexico City

by BONAVENTURA BASSEGODA

THE EXHIBITION *Pintura de los Reinos. Identidades compartidas en el mundo hispánico (Painting in the Kingdoms. Shared Identities in the Hispanic World)*, was seen by this reviewer at the Palacio Real and the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid (closed 30th January)¹ and is now at the **Palacio de Cultura Banamex, Mexico City** (to 30th June).² It focuses on the relationship between Spanish painting of the Golden Age and works produced during that period in Spain's American kingdoms, principally Mexico (Nueva España) and Peru. It is curated by Jonathan Brown, working in collaboration with a committee of five specialists in the field, and is the outcome of a ten-year research project led by Juana Gutiérrez Haces (1948–2007), professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, whose premature death meant that she did not see this great undertaking come to fruition. A permanent record of various associated conferences is found in four substantial volumes of essays published in Mexico in 2009.³

In Madrid this was an event of great importance, given both the relatively poor representation in Spanish collections of painting from the Americas of the early modern era, and how few exhibitions have been held in Spain of art of that period. *Pintura de los Reinos* is the first show in Spain to be devoted exclusively to Latin American painting of the early modern era, and its aim is to offer a new basis for the evaluation of such works which overturns the cliché of artistic dependency that is so deeply rooted in the cultural imagination.⁴ We must abandon the stereotype of a body of work that is 'colonial' and provincial, merely imitative, and of poorer quality than metropolitan models and also the reductive method of studying New World schools of painting in isolation. Instead we should regard them as a visual culture in which all the kingdoms of the former Hispanic monarchy participated. The intention is to make us think with more subtlety and complexity about the way in which Flemish and Italian figurative models were incorporated into Spanish painting. The creation of an artistic style in the Americas followed a path similar to that in Spain, but one that was more complex, considering the presence there of a third model (the Spanish) through which the Flemish and Italian influences were filtered. But it is also one which, through the medium of prints, and the arrival in the Americas of European artists, preserved its own autonomy and in its turn influenced other artists.

It was not easy to express this complex thesis in an exhibition through the selection of paintings. The curator had to reach beyond the visual impact and the artistic

merit of the works, although this initial, emotional approach is very powerful, given that the exhibition includes some outstanding examples of Spanish painting never shown publicly before in Madrid. These include Alonso Vázquez's *Immaculate Conception* (cat. p.115; Fig.95), Jusepe Ribera's *St Francis of Assisi and the angel with the water bottle* from the Museo del Palazzo Bianco in Genoa (p.99), Claudio Coello's *The vision of St Bernard* from the Granados Collection, Bartolomé Murillo's *Death of Pedro Arbués* from the Vatican Museums (p.102), Juan de Valdés Leal's *Vision of St Ignatius at La Storta* from Lima (p.103) and Carreño de Miranda's *Immaculate Conception* from the Hispanic Society of America, New York (p.119). Beside the work of these well-known Spanish masters, paintings made in the Americas hold their own both formally and in their creative energy, and may be admired as original variants in the common language of religious painting. Cristóbal de Villalpando (Fig.94), José Juárez, Baltasar de Echave Rioja and Juan Rodríguez Juárez are outstanding artists, and to be able to study their work in this context was a real revelation.

The aim of the exhibition is not restricted to presenting American works rarely seen in Europe, but to make us think about the origins and development of this common language and shared visual identity. To this end it presents a number of thematic sections, not arranged chronologically or geographically. Four are devoted to the emergence of a Renaissance visual language based on the hybridisation of the Italian model and that of the Flemish realist tradition. This process can be observed at work in every Hispanic cultural context thanks to three factors: first, the presence of Italian, Flemish or 'Italianised' Spanish artists who worked and settled in the Americas; second, the arrival there of works



95. *The Immaculate Conception*, by Alonso Vázquez. c.1590. Canvas, 283 by 206 cm. (Museo de Bellas Artes, Seville; exh. Palacio de Cultura Banamex, Mexico City).

commissioned from prestigious European artists; and third, the continual importation of Italian and especially Flemish prints, which made artists familiar with High Renaissance conventions and, a little later, with the compositional innovations of Rubens and his school. The exhibition demonstrates very effectively the way in which prints, and the paintings on which they were based, were used as models.

Grouped together were works by the earliest Italian, Spanish and Flemish artists who went to the Americas, several of whom had

already trained and worked in Seville, the city that was the vital link between Spain and the New World. Other sections gathered works together that shared typological or iconographic motifs, enabling us to compare paintings from different geographical areas, and to confirm that over and above minor formal variations they show strong similarities in visual language and narrative structure. That idea emerges especially clearly in the case of religious painting and in a number of typological motifs, for example, paintings depicting statues of the Virgin that were the object of popular devotion, a type of pious imagery that was widespread throughout the Hispanic world. Portraits are presented in a separate section, although some are included in the section on the Conquest – paintings celebrating what were then recent historical events – and others in the section 'Women with divine qualities or saints with human traits' on the representation of young female saints. This part of the exhibition would have benefited from the inclusion of more works, and from more extensive commentary in the volume of essays, since one gained the impression that in this category the art of the New World made a significantly different contribution from that of Spain.

In Madrid the impact of this exhibition was lessened by being shown on two sites. Madrid lacks a space for large temporary exhibitions comparable with the Grand Palais in Paris, for example. There is no question that innovative exhibitions of this calibre deserve to make a greater impact and that, unfortunately, their success sometimes depends on the places in which they are displayed. The Ministry of Culture should explore ways of making good this deficiency.

¹ The exhibition was organised by the Patrimonio Nacional and the Museo Nacional del Prado, and was sponsored by a number of Spanish and Mexican cultural and financial institutions.

² Catalogue: *Pintura de los Reinos. Identidades compartidas en el mundo hispánico*. Edited by Jonathan Brown. 157 pp. incl. 127 col. ills. (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2009), €115. ISBN 978-607-7612-48-3. This publication, consisting of a brief overview, essays and a list of the 120 exhibited works, is intended for the general public.

³ J. Gutiérrez Haces, ed.: *Pintura de los Reinos. Identidades compartidas. Territorios del mundo hispánico, siglos XVI-XVIII*, 4 vols., 1556 pp. incl. numerous col. + b. & w. ills. (Fomento Cultural Banamex, Mexico City, 2009), €120. ISBN 978-607-7612-00-1; English edition: *Painting in the Kingdoms. Shared Identities in the Hispanic World*. ISBN 978-607-7612-06-3; Portuguese edition: ISBN 978-607-7612-03-2.

⁴ This change in approach was reflected in earlier exhibitions including J. Gutiérrez Haces et al., eds.: exh. cat. *Cristóbal de Villalpando*, Mexico City (Fomento Cultural Banamex) and Madrid (Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando) 1997; and J. Bérchez, ed.: *Los siglos de Oro en los virreinos de América 1550-1700*, Madrid (Museo de América) 2000. The recent exhibition *Revelaciones: las artes en América latina 1492-1820*, Philadelphia (Museum of Art), Mexico (Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso) and Los Angeles (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) in 2006-07, did not, unfortunately, come to Spain.



94. *Allegory of the name of the Virgin Mary*, by Cristóbal de Villalpando. c.1690-1700. Canvas, 183 by 291 cm. (Museo de la Basílica de Santa María de Guadalupe, Mexico City; exh. Palacio de Cultura Banamex, Mexico City).