

## Arancha Goyeneche. *A cutter on the eyeball*

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Arancha Goyeneche has repeatedly said that her work is better conceived of as painting than as any other form of which it might remind us: thus, it isn't collage, despite most of her pieces being made of coloured shards of vinyl stuck to the pictorial surface; and it isn't photography, even though this has been the basis of her latest output. She also insists that her motifs most often spring from her direct contact with nature and landscape.<sup>1</sup>

If we seek a germinal influence in her attitude to landscape, I don't think one need look much further than Cézanne. The old master of Aix was the first to work on landscape through monochrome musical spectra achieved with rhythmic, sequential brushwork. In my view, this conception of painting is more truly the forerunner of Cubism than the time-honoured theory of the transformation of nature into its primordial forms of cube, cylinder and sphere.

But Cézanne went a lot further than that special quality of his brushwork, which was revolutionary in itself. We could say that he moulded what later became the modern and contemporary ways of treating landscape: first, the fragmentation of vision; and further out towards the boundaries, as Robert Hughes has lucidly pointed out, the replacement of the assertion 'this is what I see' with the question 'is this what I see?'. 'Everything is relative. Doubt becomes part of the subject of painting.'<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, we have sequentialisation, the tendency of the image towards endless repetition. Then there is the use of cut-off, the variable framing of what is visible or exposed to the viewer. In its contemporary analogy, this method is especially present in the work of Arancha Goyeneche, who uses a double cut-off technique: applying

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<sup>1</sup> In an early text Xabier Sáenz de Gorbea says, 'The Romantic quality emerges in the landscape-like references of the motifs. Titles such as those in her series *Pintando bajo la lluvia* ('Painting in the rain') assert this affect-related attitude between subject, object and motif. But it is not merely the visual nature of the moment that is shown, but also mixed and complex poly-sensory observations ... It is about reviewing the very essence of landscape and the relationship between the artist and her medium, and about creating a new vector of relationship between the subject and the reception of the work: between the autonomous awareness of a set of media and their connotational possibilities.'  
Xabier Sáenz de Gorbea. "La pared incorporada: Arancha Goyeneche" ('The wall built in: Arancha Goyeneche').

<sup>2</sup> Robert Hughes, *El impacto de lo nuevo. El arte en el siglo XX*. (orig., *The Shock of the New*) Círculo de Lectores / Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 2000.

the cutter to the material itself, and using inserts in the image. Finally, we have the ambiguity and vibration of her colour ranges, which often tend towards an almost monochromatic modulation.

These aspects – fragmentation, sequentialisation, cut-off, chromatic ambiguity and near-monochromatic vibration – are realised in Arancha Goyeneche's work with a scrupulous attention to her own time. With even greater force, she, too, asks the question posed by Hughes: 'is this what I see?'

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The sum of these factors, which are at some times complementary and at others contradictory, enables the artist to enact a play of analogies that constitute the vision she provides.

Thus, *Mar de nácar* ('Sea of mother-of-pearl'), 1997, springs from the aqueous and unexpected transparency of ash-grey vinyl. In *La misma imagen* ('The same image'), also 1997, the raggedly cut strips of vinyl, dyed different tones of green, refer the viewer to the chromatic variations of the rolling hills of a landscape photographed, paradoxically, in black and white. In the catalogue, this photograph is shown on the page opposite the work itself.

Goyeneche shows us both 'natural landscapes' – coded, as it happens, by the month of the year, hence *Enero*, *Septiembre*, *Octubre*, *Noviembre* and *Diciembre*, all dated 2000 – and 'artificial landscapes', made from the hearts of the vinyl rolls: thus, the *álbumes de viaje* ('travel albums', 1999 and 2000), and the *paisajes musicales* ('musical landscapes'), for each of which she names the dominant colour (*Paisajes musicales, rojo*; *Paisajes musicales, azul*; and *Paisajes musicales, gris*, all dated 1998). Then there is the monumental *Jardín de las delicias* ('Garden of delights'), an individualisable polyptych which she exhibited at the Sala Amadís gallery in Madrid in 1999. The garden, of course, is in a certain sense a sensory artifice of nature, as it is composed and organised by human hands. Also in evidence are 'urban landscapes', like *De paso por NY, la Noche* ('Dropping by NY, night-time') and *De paso por NY, Manhattan*, both dated 2000.

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I feel that her use of small formats is significant. For instance, in the series *Las puertas de Europa* ('The gates of Europe', 1997). In 1992 Xabier Sáenz de Gorbea had already noted how Arancha Goyeneche's 'use of the small scale is by no means fortuitous; rather, it is a symptom of delicacy and inner emotion'<sup>3</sup>.

For my part, her recourse to small formats cannot but remind me of earlier works, with which, as far as I can see and recall, she shares a similar constructive impulse. Cases in point would be the collages by Gustavo Torner and Gerardo Rueda in the 1970s.

There is also an echo, albeit more subtle, of Robert Ryman's use of paper, and a poetic air that reminds me of the Pole Jiri Kolar, for whom cutting and reconstruction involved rebuilding a poetic metaphor from the standpoint of seeing.

All these forerunners I have mentioned exemplify that same inclusion of the musical within the visual. This intercalation stems from a mathematical sense of composition – which we might also see in Klee – and an interpretation of the variants arising from one and the same 'phrase', to coin a metaphor. Arancha Goyeneche's touch explores this second aspect, so her vision doesn't spring from mathematical combinations but from unexpected – though measured – impulses of her innate sensibility, or from recollections of visual sounds perceived at a time and in a place far removed from the paintable surface.

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The critic who has most deeply and extensively examined Arancha Goyeneche's work is Francisco Javier San Martín, who calls her landscapes 'evoked landscapes'<sup>4</sup>.

He underlines the industrial or 'prepared' quality of the colours used by the artist. In his view, this brings her in touch with the proposals of Moholy-Nagy, Manzoni, Vasarely, Richter and Alighiero Boetti. With this artist, says San Martín, the restriction to the catalogue range of adhesive tape is an escape from the 'human retina' obsession of pictorial representation.

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<sup>3</sup> Xabier Sáenz de Gorbea, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Francisco Javier San Martín, "Espacios protegidos" ('Protected spaces'), catalogue for the *Arancha Goyeneche* exhibition, Galería Siboney, Santander, 21 November to 16 December 1998.

I disagree with this deduction, which is nonetheless perfectly coherent with San Martín's line of discourse. I view Goyeneche's work as, precisely, 'retina formalism', forced by the procedure of cutting and representational reconstruction, and become the backbone of her production and of the possibilities for contemplation offered to the viewer. The continuous repetition of the same method of observation and realisation displaces the subject and its meaning to the point where neither has been constituted and reconstructed in the image, which does not refer to the original gaze but to the scenic background that it becomes before the viewer's eyes<sup>5</sup>.

San Martín also mentions the fragmentation of the pictorial tissue – detecting its ancestry in Matisse, Derain and Seurat – and the overflow of the work from its ostensible support. This last feature, which is characteristic of her more sculptural pieces, has even led her (as in *Muestrario azul*, 'Blue sample-book', 1999) to arrange the vinyl strips to make up a screen, like a curtain, which is superimposed on several small-format pieces hung on the wall in traditional fashion. This, then, is re-fragmentation of the viewer's gaze, which must take in a doubly cleaved surface, as though the artist's cutter has cleft both the vinyl tape and the viewer's eyeball.

Where she uses a photograph of the inside cylinder of the vinyl roll, the result is more like architecture than landscape: this reinforces my view of how Goyeneche's chosen procedure constitutes the visible.

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<sup>5</sup> Alicia Murría, in her presentation of a collective exhibition in Madrid, agrees on this point: 'Whatever their final presentation, these works bespeak an interest in plumbing the depths of painting itself, and above all the mechanisms of vision: how the retina captures that infinity of small fragments and organises them so as to delineate not so much a specific image as a sensation that our brain can identify. They are planes of colour that vibrate as we draw near with a light glister of particles, which, looking back on the history of painting, brings to mind the pointillist work of Seurat.' Alicia Murría, "Entrecruzamientos" ('Crossovers'), Cat. *Arancha Goyeneche*, Carmen Hernández, Laura Torrado. Sala Amadís. Instituto de la Juventud. 4 May to 17 June 1999.