

Images in white

*“A Lady white, within the Field
In Placid Lily sleeps!”
Emily Dickenson*

A slim window looks out onto the landscape, framed in white, like a cameo; a little box of treasures, were one keeps ones most intimate memories, like a tiny portrait or a loved one's lock of hair.

Sometimes, people hang them on a chain around their neck, like a trophy or amulet, palpitating on their chest, near their heart. A painting can also be thought of as a trophy or an amulet, where the treasure of an unforgettable experience is preserved, although, in this case, it is hung on the wall.

The fact that paintings hang on walls, converts them into something public, unlike a cameo. This, however, does not take away their intimacy. It is true that anyone can look at them, but not everyone will discover their secret, or understand them with one glance. In any case, by the simple act of looking, one can see a painting within a painting; one looks out a window where, perhaps, a framed landscape can be observed, flanked by wide white sashes.

I am thinking about the latest works of Darya von Berner, a young painter, who began her artistic career very attached to realistic visions, starting with panoramic views of cities. Those urban landscapes were later left behind for representations of nature or empty interiors, the latter in the form of the ample vacant space of a dilapidated warehouse. For about a year, I think it began when she moved to Paris, not far from the Woods, Darya von Berner has been painting deep green wild spaces, framed by dense, wide white masses. The change of motif, however, has not distracted her from the geometric trimming she has always used to emphasize her viewpoint as a fragment, a parceled, delimited vision, making one reconcile with the pre-established form of her point of observation, which forces it to be seen a certain way.

These forced visions remind me of what Degas said about how to observe a nude: look at it, as if you were looking through a peep- or a keyhole. These furtive glances reveal the indiscrete spy, who, without being seen, hopes to discover a spontaneous gesture – not only to discover, what is normally hidden, but to observe reality as it is, an unconditioned reality. In Degas' case, the unveiling of the true nakedness. A very good painter is, by necessity, a voyeur, or, if you will, a spy, because he searches for new viewpoints with which to better see an always hidden reality.

Darya von Berner has always been involved with visions forced by another kind of nature. In that sense, I think it is not excessive to analyze her pictorial trajectory by studying the way in which she has framed her visions, generally marked by the architecture of certain peepholes or bars of rectangular light, visions pressed by the rigid parallel lines, which only permit her to see a limited field. Her images, even before she emphasized the white bands of interference with black and white, have almost always had the look of

being stuck on, like photographs in an album, or even like the photographs chosen to hang on a wall as reflections of our intimacy.

Photo albums or walls covered with family icons - loved ones and desired ones, one is as real as the other, going beyond an objective circumstantial relationship with which to endorse our relationships – the intimacy of these intimate images is not in what they represent, but in the intimate space that the person who decides to put these images together creates, apart from what they may show.

People as well as landscapes, or personalized landscapes, these domestic icons have, of course, a kinship with the cameos I referred to earlier, which hold erotic trophies or amulets of secret experiences. The photograph of a loved one or a simple postcard, stuck on the wall with thumbtacks. These affectionate images refer us to the iconography of interior, to an album of memories in which traces of life are placed as a visible confirmation that they have been lived.

I confessed that I have lived, if I remember correctly, is the emphatic title of Neruda's memoirs, the diary of his life, his traces. More iconic, St. Augustine's memoirs were titled *Confessions*. And it is true that reviewing one's own life is like an attestation, in which to relieve the conscience. But not even someone, who boasted of having no conscience, like Salvador Dalí, could resist the temptation to title his memoirs *Unconfessable Confessions*.

Of course, I don't think that Darya von Berner has much to do with the three fore mentioned personalities, nor is she exactly of age to be revealing her vital experience to us. Not to say that she doesn't use painting as a form of intimate revelation, whether or not it is a way of relieving her conscience. In her case, the intimate revelation, lacking vital experience, seems more of a way of loading her conscience in order to better orient herself in the world through painting, rather than a confession that alleviates the weight of living by relating personal memories. I mean that the icons that she encloses in her white containers are desiderata, a chronicle of her ideas. Thus, it is a chronicle that is related to the photo album or cameo, but also to the animated landscape of events found in outdoor decoration, in a fresco. There is an organization of ideas that surges from the walls and ceiling like a magic eruption from the legendary world.

Great frescos have provided a fantastic space of unity through the juxtaposition of fragments, like pieces of a puzzle. Figurative fragments or those borrowed from architecture and ornamental details that form the whole emerge or are cut out of white, that wall-white that is more than simply an absence of paint. Darya von Berner uses the wall-white within each painting to achieve that same effect of isolation, also used to reinforce the magic flotation of her suspended icons.

Broad sashes of pasty white, what Darya von Berner's latest icons seem to want, is to suspend everyday life, giving way to nature. She paints forests and gardens, wild, green, shady spots that make us contemplate them like luminous rounds, openings at the end of a dark tunnel, all padded with white. They are, in a way, like the "high windows" that the poet Larkin spoke of:

*"the glasses where the sun fits and, beyond
the deep blue air, that shows nothing
and is nowhere, and is unending".*

But they are also precise prints that concentrate our vision on the symbols

that will orientate us, like a tree, the best physical and mental indication for finding our way back.

Darya von Berner seems to have understood that painting is a way of illuminating vision, a sort of revelation and a way of isolating what is meaningful. In this sense, I think that the focus is more important than the theme itself, which could be defined as realist. It would be logical then, to conclude that Darya von Berner treats reality as an isolated event, a precise revelation all dressed in white, an icon worthy of hanging on the wall, the wall converted into a source of the most intimate secrets and longings.

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