

The painter Cristina del Campo (b. Riosapero, Cantabria, 1981) received the 2010 Cantabrian Government Plastic Arts Prize with a piece entitled Pita, an intriguing plant-life depiction which, in addition to this earning her this public recognition, marked a turning point in the artist's pictorial development. In the wake of her doctoral research into the still life, she has focused her interest on the object - its representation through painting, its ability to structure the pictorial surface and its communicative power.

From these thematic and compositional perspectives, Cristina del Campo's poetics can be traced to the conflict between abstraction and decoration which characterised much of twentieth century art. In a sense, her works of recent years can be viewed as a distancing from an initial masculine phase of the still life of cubist origin, increasingly replaced by painting that assimilates multiple contributions, exhibiting syncretic ethics and attaching a great deal of importance to the line as a compositional factor.

The indirect references include examinations of American pattern painting, a superimposition of patterns and motifs that recalls the repetition typical of the work traditionally done by women, such as sewing or ceramics. The concept that Miriam Schapiro conceived of as femmage, the inclusion of para-pictorial techniques: collage, assemblage, photomontage, embroidery, piercings etc. in a new discourse, is resolved solely through paint, alluding to the results that these innovations entailed in painting, such as the superimposition of figures, transparencies, visual shocks and changes of perspective and scale. It is painting therefore that alludes to everything else: to design, to architecture and to editorial creation. It is painting that feeds from everywhere: street graffiti, professional sample books or fashion magazines, among many other sources of contemporary images.

This amalgam of resources and influences positions Cristina's recent work at the centre of what Hal Foster described in *Design and Crime* as an extreme decorative trend characterised by the aestheticisation of all objects. Design has become the fundamental factor in our appreciation of objects, so that we tend to separate their functionality to an irrelevant sphere and focus on their abstract character, their appearance.

Her selection of the objects that appear in these works is based solely on their formal characteristics, which is why this kind of painting is moving closer and closer to abstraction, becoming independent from its literary content and seeking to function by itself in the plastic sphere.

Sample books

The work of Cristina del Campo (see the collection of forty small paintings that make up the piece *Bajo Techo*, 2010-2011) is sometimes reminiscent of the old illustrated books used in training and practice in professional trades: repertoires of paving, structures, foundations, furniture and fittings, roofs, engineering works. But defying strict regulations, the closed catalogue of possibilities, the painter proposes a performativity that opens up new channels of meaning in the idea put forward by the post-structuralist philosophy of Judith Butler: the need to invert the dominating discursive practices, to acknowledge the abilities of the body and language, to involve ourselves completely in our creative capacity, to associate ourselves with the world and influence its design.

The *Lámparas* series, 2010-2011, illustrates these ideas with clarity, introducing viewers to the initial idea of a game that must be completed, though insufficient instructions are provided. The lamps, depicted using lines, profiles that reveal the unreal inner spaces that would be lit up if they were real, are suspended,

decontextualised objects. They are structures, meshes of straight lines and curves. As propounded by Paul Valéry, the work of art has the capacity to suspend reality.

Shopping carts

The design of the works that make up the series entitled Shopping carts (New York pieces), 2011, is also fragmentary and allusive. It was conceived during the artist's lengthy stay in the United States, when she collected numerous themes and motifs with the idea of recreating them later on.

Interested in examining modernist utopias, this work on consumer architectures and the pleasure encapsulated in American shopping malls exhales the aroma of planned obsolescence that these spaces proclaim. The luxurious lamps, the metallic grids, the balconies with garlands and the staircases speak of a trashy monumentality, of children's birthday parties, of a consumerist and aestheticised sociability. They are spaces that create superficial experiences of well-being, pleasant colours, easy designs... Art, the critic Ángel González argues, is first and foremost a sensory experience.

Text included in the catalogue of the exhibition *Pitas, Lamps & Shopping Carts*. Biblioteca Central, Santander. (2011)