

TANJA POL GALERIE

Veron Urdarianu

Reconstructions

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We live in a world full of images. Never has there been so much visual information as there is today. One could almost say that we are buried in images, magazines, advertising, television, the internet, and art. Never has it been so easy to see so many works of art. Is it possible that this flood of visual information is desensitizing us—that pictures are simply ricocheting off of us?

The Blank Painting?

About fifteen years ago, the French author Yasmina Reza touched upon this problem of visual reception in her very successful play, *Art*, although, actually, the play was about the difficulties experienced by a group of male friends. She took a painting without an image—just a white painting—and used it as an opportunity to involve three friends in a debate about the various aspects of the value of contemporary art, and more. Even though the blank painting is not actually the focus of attention, the author was interested in the idea of turning an expensive, blank painting into a theme for debate. Yet, the monochromatic painting has long been a familiar object in art, for monochromes have been around since at least the eighteenth century.

So it does not matter that the painting apparently depicts nothing—it still has an impact. Would that be all the more true, however, if it did depict something—maybe something that we think we recognize?

Déjà vu

Just as there are self-referential and reflexive encounters outside the boundaries of time in literature and music, visual artists also make works of art out of the exploration of art (although not exclusively), creating them in the form of the citation, or a more or less precise copy, a variation of previous evocations, or in resistance to what has come before—in short, creating art out of art. The phenomenon is certainly one of the things that makes the work of art historians (to stick with the visual arts) so interesting: they track the source materials, they make associations, they discover references, they uncover relationships—even if the artist himself may not have been aware of them; if he has conjured them unconsciously out of his *musée imaginaire*, as André Malraux once called it, out of that full depository of visual memories that most of us carry within us.

I noticed Veron Urdarianu's paintings many years ago, when they caught my attention several times. Once, because of that visual quotation that I often think I encounter frequently, and again because of the unusual colors, which look as if they are being seen through fog or frosted glass; this effect erases the impression that the objects in his painting are realistically reproduced, and at the same time, the tactile appearance of the thick edges and the impasto of his colors obviously anchors them in it and in art history, and not just in them, but also in other visual sources. This was something very new; it was exciting; it was something surprising in the midst of the flood of images.

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Art Comes from Art

Art comes from art! Even painting, frequently declared dead, is always being reinvented, fortunately. But hasn't everything already been painted? Is there anything at all that has not yet been painted? In the age of technical reproduction, innovation, and "anything is possible"—in other words, in an epoch in which no sort of "style specifications" have existed for a long time, where there are no imaginary rules that artists use as points of orientation—is it at all necessary to paint new pictures, or do the paintings evoke entirely different sources, even if they use the topoi of reproduction or incorporate realistic quotations from photography, film television, and the Internet, and reproduce them with different visual methods?

What makes the paintings of Veron Urdarianu so exciting is, first, the veiled and concealing way they use quotations; we can often decode these, because the artist does try to hide from us the source materials upon which they are based. Even if, occasionally, we cannot figure out which original image may have been the inspiration for one of his works, the painting's obvious referential character still seems to have a hidden source. In that case, the process of decoding has yet to take place, or else we are unable to pinpoint it, because Urdarianu's painting has become autonomous and is only making an imaginary reference.

Urdarianu is allowing us to experience a very special kind of déjà-vu, which does not end with us saying, "I've already seen that." Instead, it refers to memory, while also creating an intriguing relationship to the original image, which we might suddenly see in a totally different way; it also regenerates itself out of the changed way that he deals with his "after-images." The "a-ha" experience of recognition follows upon the heels of self-observation, a kind of a case history of one's own process of observing pictures, which can be worked out through the interpretation of the picture, the new view through the frosted glass of his alterations.

With his view of painting, Urdarianu finds himself in good company. Amid the flood of electronic images it is hardly possible to invent one's own pictures, new pictures. Just as nature always repeats itself, creating an immensely broad, yet nevertheless ultimately limited, diverse spectrum of life, if we look away from the rare mutations, then art also has to be satisfied with the images already at hand.

Veron Urdarianu has invented a visual vocabulary of his own for this, in which knowledge and intelligence unite with sensory perception and powerful painting, and that is what makes his art so very distinctive. And isn't that the best thing that can be said about an artist?

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