

Vazio Contido / Contained Emptiness



Beyond the material dimension of the object, one expects a work of art to bear a conceptual substrata, an immaterial content that lifts us from the plane of objects; an expectation inherited from the notion of an object of art as an object of worship, as something acting as a bridge between the world of phenomena and a supposed world of ideas. Ricardo Rendon's first solo exhibition in Brazil tackles this demand for transcendence impinged upon artwork, emphasising the presence of emptiness precisely in the matter. The exhibition brings to us an accumulation of voids.

"There is ample metaphysics in not thinking at all", wrote Alberto Caeiro. And Rendon demonstrates the metaphysics of things in the things themselves, with their voids that fail to leave this world, fail to search for explanations in anything beyond that which can be seen and touched, anything beyond the softness of the wool felt, the material in Rendon's works that seems to absorb the sound of the words of the Keeper of Sheep. It is within the work, in that which can be seen and touched, and in its process of creation, that the thought generated by the work remains, not outside it.

As given in the exhibition title, chosen by the artist, the emptiness is contained both as being under control, accepted as part of existence, and as being content of the exhibition. What we see in the works assembled at the Zipper gallery is the emptiness contained in each piece, missing parts of the tissue structuring the work, the active emptiness, outlining the shape of things, like an immanent power, generator of things that exist here, and only exist thanks to the emptiness.

A profusion of voids are spread around the gallery, some formed regularly in the felt, others giving way for light to pass through the wood, then voids that cut out gracious curves in what would otherwise be a monotonous straight line, voids that need not be filled, matter that is made more malleable by the voids, and that gives itself to being folded in several forms, revealing its potential multiplicity, engaged by the voids. None of the works attempt to fill the emptiness, none of them want to reinsert the little discs of material scattered on the floor. What is of concern is the creation of the emptiness and by the emptiness; a construction that originates from cutting. To fill in the emptiness would be to kill the work. To accept it is to establish a respectful relationship with the material, worshipping the mysteries of that which can be seen and touched, understanding that to live is to worship life as it is presented:

*I don't believe in God because I have never seen him.
If he wanted me to believe in him,
Undoubtedly he would come to speak to me (...)
But if God is the flowers and the trees
And the hills and the sun and the moonlight,
Then I believe in him,
Then I believe in him all the time,
And my whole life is an oration and a mass,
And a communion with my eyes and through my ears.*

Thus, each of Ricardo Rendon's works acts as stimulus for the senses – with the silent softness of the felt and forms that delight though eye-pleasing ornaments - and also as a machine for thinking about the absences that frame everything that lives. Each of those forms only exists thanks to its emptiness. Without the emptiness, they would be heavy, inflexible rectangular cloths, wooden sheets that block the passage of light and air, self-enclosed boxes. There is ample immaterial content in not scorning the material.

Paula Braga, 2013.

1. Fernando Pessoa, "Há metafísica bastante em não pensar em nada", in The Keeper of Sheep - Poem V"