

CONCEPTUAL FINE ARTS

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Q&A with Rodrigo Cass: the inverse of the reverse is the right side



Rodrigo Cass (2014). Photo: Christian von Ameln.



We firstly bump into pieces by Rodrigo Cass a few months ago in Doha, while visiting a group show conceived to promote a dialogue between Brazilian and Qatari artists. A series of eight small two dimensional sculptures was questioning in a very intimate way the idea of evolution. The first ones were fragments of a broken tablet recalling a sheet of paper from a notebook. They were hanging on the wall, put back together by some pale green sticks (The control of the changes 1, 2013). Beside it, another tablet, same dimensions, was placed on a shelf with 13 cubic coloured elements emerging from its surface like if they were kind of solid words, or phrases (Antropofagia, 2013). Other tablets on the same warm wooden made shelf had titles like “Before History”, “Initiation to the revolution (Tropical)”, “Radical strategy in a Modern Organization”. History, sociology, philosophy and human sensitivity were interlaced path leading to a vague religious feeling inspired by a need of understanding. A few weeks later we submitted our questionnaire to the artist. Two months later his answers told us that behind those series of visual metaphors someone was trying to understand his own roots.

Which is your favorite subject?

I don't have a specific subject. Carmelite philosophy and spirituality are the main sources where I find inspiration for my life and my work. I think a lot about the relationship between spirituality and art. The great thing is that I can make these issues public in many ways and also make them political.

Do you believe in abstraction?

What is not abstract is concrete, physical, manifest, lucent, known, evident, etc..., thus it appears easier to believe in what is not abstract, but no. These concepts intersect all the time and are mixed together in my work where everything seems concrete and at the same time abstract.

I experience a constant debate on the concreteness of things and I need to make choices when everything appears so real and solid that it seems to break up and dissolve into a ruin.

*For me, abstraction is much closer to the Latin word from which it originates: *abstrahere*. Its meaning is to synthesize, separate, isolate, all part of the act of choosing. Thus a conscious choice is a state of abstraction, as you need to renounce, *abstrahere*, many other things in favor of one or a few. We are at all times *abstrahere*, renouncing, choosing and experimenting.*

I wish to make free choices in my work, so that the known ("concrete") and the unknown ("abstract") may be even more represented in their true essence, as a mutation of state and position. Thus the mutation is a conscious choice and a form of abstraction and manifestation.

Art is an experience so we can choose which subjects we want to see in each work. The experience of one person is different from another and transcends any scientific explanation. Our experience through art creates something that goes beyond and transcends science. It is impossible to replicate in its entirety the feelings and great learning of that one experience thus no one experience is accountable for all and it should not be so.

Nothing in this world is pure. We live in constant abstrahere. Nothing exists in an isolated form. I am unable to separate abstraction from something more rooted in the things of this world: science, faith, politics, form and society. When I say that something exists I am actually already stating the opposite. The inverse of the reverse is the right side.

In the video "Físico" I am creating an abstraction with concrete things: a match, my hand, fire, the space. My hands first appear, against a white background, holding a lit match. The match burns until I can no longer hold it with my hand without getting burned. My hand lets go of the match. It falls on the white background which also burns revealing a different background, this time black. My hand reappears on the screen and once again drops the match on the black background revealing another white background and so on, inLinks a continuous loop.

Many things of this world are made up of black and white: newspapers, books, images, but here is also a reference to skin colour, to opposites or extremes: the other extreme of white is black. The holes caused by the flame are inspired by the cuts on canvas made by Lucio Fontana. These offer the possibility to look at the space beyond the painting, to the other side. A simple operation reveals the complexity of actions.

This is how I see my videos: rich in references to paintings, sculptures and all matters regarding opposites, politics and physics.

Which is the most inspiring place for you?

Two places, but one is actually an extension of the other: my church and my home. I don't see them as separate places as they are part of me, sacred, central places where I can think and create.

Who is your favourite artist?

Many. I couldn't mention them all. Some are more in connection with my own work, artists like Richard Serra, Lygia Pape or Chris Burden.

Is there any old master that you like?

Yes, many, but Michelangelo shows how an artist is as researcher just like a philosopher. He is a connoisseur of the laws of Nature and of the human soul. He revolutionizes anatomy and always brings me back to a desire to humanize humanity, sanctify it, as it becomes even more human. The more human, the more divine and sacred.

Is there any colour or shape you really hate?

I do not wish to hate anything, especially as I believe colours are interdependent as a system.

What makes an idea become an artwork?

Being a universal idea. Art brings together all kinds of subjects and calls them into question openly and without expectations. Art is made of real ideas.

Which novel is better comparable to your idea of art?

The Old Testament and the search for redemption.

What would you have done if you were not an artist?

I would cease to exist.

(translation from Portuguese by Silvia Venturini)

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