



The Insinuation of an Encounter

ELISA VALERIO

Eduardo Cardozo is a silent artist. His art is carefully crafted and, at the same time, complex. His thoughts are intricate, and his pace is frantic. Ideas for which he can barely find the right words bunch together. He is not one for writing letters or speeches, he feels more comfortable doing and thinking with his hands and through his body. He likes to get his hands dirty, touch the materials, feel them, and use that experience to encourage reflection.

He defines himself as a painter who paints on different media and materials, both with oil paint or working with cloth, darning and sewing it... For him, these are all different ways of painting. Same thing with his installations and interventions in bronze, iron, clay and so on. This is his language, as well as his way of connecting with the outside world.

Since the year 2000, with his solo show *Equilibrio inestable* [Unstable Balance], held at Montevideo's Centro de Exposiciones SUBTE, the idea of going beyond boundaries, those of materials and shapes, has been present, along with that of shedding light and exposing a painting's most intimate side: its canvas, its weave. These were, partially, what some of his other works looked into: *Tramas* [Wefts] (2019) and *El origen de la trama* [The Origin of the Weft] (2019). Cardozo operates in the dichotomy of the public and the private, and the liminal space that arises in between. In his oeuvre, he explores a feeling of incongruence or disorientation that forces us to stop and take a second look to understand.

The submission for the Uruguay Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia is an installation entitled *Latent*. It is an immersive piece which establishes a relational act between two distant painters: Uruguay's Eduardo Cardozo and Venice's Tintoretto.

This conversation comprises three instances: *the nude*, *the vestments*, and *the veil*. *The nude*, on one hand, is the transportation of Cardozo's atelier wall to Venice by means of the *stacco* technique. *The vestments*, on the other hand, is an interpretation by the Uruguayan artist of one of the rough sketches for Tintoretto's *Paradise*. And, lastly, *the veil* is a length of cloth resulting from sawing together scraps of the gauze used for transporting the atelier wall. Thus, a counterpoint emerges between Uruguay and Italy, the south and the north, Cardozo's work and his reimagining of Tintoretto's painting.

This relationship is conditioned by distance and diluted in time, a time that clearly is neither linear nor universal in nature (that is, singular, totalizing and set in stone) —a homochronic dimension—, but di-versal (of two, relational, dialogical) —from a heterochronic perspective—, another time, an inner one. In turn, this is an imperfect encounter, as it is permeated by a unique and subjective point of view, which is not devoid of affection.

THE NUDE

Firstly, Cardozo decided to put on display the skin of his atelier and transported the surface layers of his atelier walls via the *stacco* technique. This way, he reveals his most personal side as an artist, hence, *the nude*, the space where he conceives and produces his oeuvre. These walls hint at their use and changes over time; they attest to and are physical and aesthetical proof of Cardozo's work process and the evolution of his ideas and artistic research.

In his series entitled *Capas* [Layers] (2018), the concept of skin had already appeared: skin as fabric, skin as the human boundary, a personal boundary, which separates us and protects us from the outside world, an exact and untransferable boundary. This boundary, this externality, is what evidences the existence of others. In this series, as well as in *Blancos* [Whites] (2020), the paint is below the canvas and it is what holds it together, it is the glue, the support. Here, Cardozo subverts the basic structure of a painting, altering the order of the factors and sending the canvas into the foreground, while the paint protrudes, sneaks in, or slips through the edges of the textile. In them, Cardozo even features chunks of his atelier wall which have stuck to the canvases, scraps arising from what remains of previous works. These pieces possess a life of their own, containing many more elements than those in plain sight: there is overlapping, paint, glue, stitches, inlays in metal or other materials...

The atelier and its walls appear as an enveloping container that protects and shelters the most personal, unique and private facet of the artist. The atelier as a temple and haven. This same idea, precisely, had been addressed by him in the series entitled *Memoria del espacio* [Memory of Space] (2020-2021). Those paintings were produced during the pandemic, when isolation and interior settings took on a new, more prominent role in our lives. In this context, Cardozo sharpened his gaze to capture the inner world through the experience and atmosphere every space exudes. In these canvases, painting and reality merge and become indistinguishable from each other. This is an intimist series, in which Cardozo decides to focus on objects around him, the walls, the floor and the canvases that envelope his daily life.

Besides, and on a more personal note, the walls of his atelier preserve the memory of exchanges, philosophical conversations and laughter shared with friends, family, and acquaintances. Somehow, these rigid surfaces become porous, absorbing and reflecting, like a mirror, the environment they have borne witness to. Thus, they bring back memories of friends who are no longer around, the gaze of Cardozo's father –an illustrator, recently deceased– and those of so many other painters throughout the history of art.

This rebuilt, imperfect and uprooted wall now hints at and manifests Cardozo's pictorial production. The cracked aquamarine paint, which speaks of an old 1930s house, under which another layer of purplish-pink paint applied by a previous owner sticks out... and so on, layer after layer until the whitewash and then the brick wall is reached, unleashing reddish dust unreservedly. On top of all this are remains, vestiges and the baggage of oil paint, the rabbit-skin glue (used to prepare the canvases) and the artist's cloths. Perhaps remarkably or randomly, all these elements have become somewhat similar and chromatically akin, the colors resemble and fade into each other, they seem to spread across the atelier and its various components, allowing us to establish invisible connections with several of his previous works.¹

Stacco –the technique of detaching a painting and its plaster– is a technique widely used by restorers and conservators to remove frescoes. It consists of transferring a painting along with its plaster preparation, also known as *intonaco*.² This strategy allows Cardozo to reconfigure his work by using the material he is the most familiar with: cloth. But, above all, it enables him to share his meditations and creative process.

It is worth noting that this is a dual procedure, due to the fact that, even though it enables us to move a mural or, in this case, certain layers of the wall from one place to another, it also lessens its meaning by isolating the original piece from its context. This is an invasive and dangerous undertaking that impacts the physical composition, material structure, and aesthetics of the original work. Thus, the outcome will never be complete; it will always suffer a certain degree of loss, both material and meaning wise. In turn, in this installation, the very relocation of the wall is one of the piece's components and gestures more conceptually rich and laden with symbolism.

This cracked wall highlights the fragility of the artist and his oeuvre, putting on the spot his rootlessness; there is no artist without a context, without a frame of reference that contains them. In this prismatic room of clean, hard lines, Cardozo's atelier walls are no longer enveloping, engrafted instead on a single wall in a linear fashion, their otherness highlighted because of the change of location. The austere and impersonal architecture of the national pavilion clash with and is incongruous with the longing for a traditional Uruguayan house from the early 20th century. As a result, the wall becomes an immigrational act in Venice: a Uruguayan wall inhabiting a Venetian wall.

A composition of canvases exposed on the back is added to the workshop wall. These are works that Cardozo made throughout his entire career; some of them never saw the light of day and others he decided to keep beyond belonging to a series shown in public. There is another gesture of exposure and bareness in this. These canvases, released from their frames, show us their interior, their back and their most private side. At the same time, they reveal the passage of time, since in them we can observe discoloration, as well as darkening in other cases; the penetration and permeability of the fabric that is affected by the oils and the different materials used in its preparation and painting. Through this mechanism, the artist highlights the materiality of the painting in a subtle way, as is characteristic of his work. These canvases in obverse are presented in a composition that formally dialogues with the panels of the workshop wall, but, in this case, the hardness of the wall becomes a soft material that resembles skin.

This is a dense piece of work, multi-layered and performed in stages. The extensive research the artist has been conducting for years converges in it, perhaps finding its zenith. It could be regarded as a synthesis, where paint and canvas have been shrunk to its minimum expression, to such a degree that there is room solely for the gesture. This installation appears before us as a grand synecdoche of Cardozo's work. It also embodies the idea of exploiting or pushing materials to their limits to maximize their simplicity.

Therefore, Cardozo opens himself up to encountering others with a humble disposition, naked and willing to shed his skin, but this does not mean that his point of view is not subjective. Filled with fascination and admiration for the painters of the Venetian school, he can only interpret them based on their canvases, their gestures, and their chromatic palette. As a result, he undertakes the monumental task of translating into his own language the clothes and vestments of the figures in Tintoretto's painting.

1

Chromatically speaking, the link to Cardozo's *Reflejos* [Reflections] series, in which the shades of blue, the impasto and the oil paint turn into matter while simultaneously being hazy and light, an apparent contradiction that finds a powerful, accurate resolution on large canvases. As far as painting is concerned, this wall is on the same wavelength as a series of works carried out in 2015, where remains and traces of the materials on the wall are of a delicate nature, they speak to us insinuatingly, like whispers, saying as much as they hush. Cardozo approached those pieces in a similar manner, where —through oil paint or acrylic, graphite and ink, paintbrushes or painting knives, transparencies, glazing and labile, diffuse stains— he suggested things rather than stating them, in a soft, mushy, calmed tone.

2

This technique was mainly used during the 18th and 19th centuries. Currently, it is a treatment that is performed exceptionally to conserve mural paintings whenever buildings or spaces with preservation issues collapse. The process comprises a number of phases: i) cleaning the surface to be transferred, applying a synthetic fixative that modifies the original paint colors as little as possible; ii) preparing the cotton cloths and organic glue to carefully cover the entire surface of the painting; two or three layers of fabric and glue can be applied to generate the necessary adhesion for detachment; iii) once the glue is completely dry, carefully peel off the cloths from one end using a painting knife or other tools; iv) once the painting is detached, cover the back with another layer of gauze or linen with water-insoluble glue; v) finally, when the painting is on its new support, remove the pieces of cotton fabric used for initial extraction with the help of warm water.

[P. 35]

The atelier wall was detached using the *stacco* technique on panels of 27.5 × 39.4 in (approx.) with gauze and lightweight unbleached cotton daubed in rabbit-skin glue; then, a thin layer of mortar and another sheet were attached to obtain an adequate resistance and weight to transport the piece. Finally, warm water was used to remove the initial layers of cloth and the final wall panels were obtained.

THE VESTMENTS

Secondly, like a traveler, Cardozo journeyed across space and time to delve into his destination: Venice. In his capacity as an avid reader and historian on the subject of painting, he rummages through the works of Titian, Veronese, and Tintoretto, the artists of Venetian *cinquecento*. It is in this speculation that he finds one of the two sketches for *Paradise* by Tintoretto (Jacopo Comin, 1518-1594).³ This gigantic canvas (174.5 × 494 cm), located in the hall of the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, was subject to an extensive process of reframing, cleaning, and restoration conducted between 2012 and 2013. This process is precisely one of the aspects that captivated Cardozo.

Visitors had the privilege of observing from behind a large window, for the first time ever in that venue, the progress made on the restoration of the piece. A process that usually takes place in private, restricted areas of a museum —behind the scenes— was laid bare for people to understand. The entire restoration took place alongside an exhibition that guided visitors and explained the different stages of the study, the tools and technologies used, and their contributions, to achieve a greater understanding of the painting's production.

This restoration process included the use of macrophotography, X-rays, and infrared reflectography, which allowed us to understand how Tintoretto created the piece, his methodology, corrections, and doubts... X-rays revealed that the Venetian artist painted most of his characters naked and then put clothes on them. This reveals his concern for shape, volume, and the way both were reflected on the canvas and in his drawings. This finding deeply resonated with Cardozo and his reflection on exposure and privacy, the public and the private realms.

With that as a starting point, the Uruguayan painter decided to redo, from his own perspective and gesture, *the vestments* of the figures in the painting. Thus, after conducting meticulous research and observation of each garment, he undertook a volumetric reinterpretation resorting to lightweight bleached cotton, canvas, and linen —the fabrics traditionally used as supports—, dyeing them with pigments and molding them. Cardozo strips *Paradise* of its subject and content, solely reprising its pictorial language: the shapes, the gestures, the light, the color... One more time, the Uruguayan artist decides to take the part for the whole; hence, the center of attention is on the fabrics, dispensing with other elements. His reimagining, rather than seeking to mimic the original piece in a different format, extracts a methodology from it, a certain set of gestures characteristic of the Venetian, marked by long, thick, energetic brushstrokes, laden with curvilinear movements. On these pieces of cloth, Cardozo recapture the feeling of entanglement and twisting typical of Tintoretto's budding Mannerism.

This interpretation becomes autonomous from the original piece, using volume and playing with perspective and depth. In conversation with the Venetian artist's painting, light plays a predominant role in this installation. Firstly, because this was a distinctive feature of Tintoretto's paintings, something to which he paid particular attention: a dramatic, special light is characteristic of his work. In addition, it is via the use of light, interplaying chiaroscuros and a fledgling perspective that lends depth and spatiality to a painting crammed with characters and elements. In the Uruguayan artist's adaptation, the importance of light is once again highlighted through the pursuit of emphasizing volumes and depths as well as translucencies and transparencies. With the support and collaboration of Álvaro Zinno, photographer and artist —whose oeuvre focuses on lighting design and its effects and contrasts on objects—, the resulting lighting on the vestments is greatly in tune with and correlates to the original painting by Tintoretto. By means of a multiplicity of spotlights and a raking light there is an amplification of the contrasts, shadows, volumes and chiaroscuros of each group of garments, which appear light-weight and ethereal, suspended in mid-air.

The lengths of cloth, mounted according to the original painting's composition, are organized as independent volumes hanging, moving subtly by the breeze or the visitors that walk by. These sets of cloths appear like highly fluid and harmonic floating cumuli. The Venetian colors dance in a big dialogue of organic shapes. The edges of the cloths fuse with each other, as they interlace in a constant curvilinear gesture, in what is both a tribute to Tintoretto and the Uruguayan artist's body of work and gestures characteristic of his latest pieces and series.⁴ By using this resource, Cardozo focuses on the cloths to, by omission, reveal the absences: the characters are missing.

Moreover, the vestments are a counterpoint to the bareness of Cardozo's atelier wall. Within these vestments lies an intention and a search for intimacy, an attention to what identifies us as human beings, as individuals distinct from one another, recognizable in our uniqueness. Our personal space, intrinsically human and individual, untransferable, a place which is entirely ours, private, sheltered from the gaze of others.

3

Tintoretto's painting *Paradise* arises from a competition to replace the fresco that had been painted by Guariento di Arpo (1310/1320-1368/1370) in approximately 1365, which had burned down during a fire that broke out in 1577 inside the Sala del Maggior Consiglio of the Doge's Palace in Venice. After a number of difficulties that plagued the competition, which was won by Veronese —who passed away before being able to honor the commission—, Tintoretto was eventually given the job. According to the competition's terms and conditions, *Paradise* depicts the Coronation of the Virgin by her son Jesus Christ, who takes up the central area at the top of the canvas, inspired by Dante's idea of Paradise. Surrounding this, a multitude of characters are located and arranged according to their position in religious hierarchies: angels, cherubs, the blessed, and others, floating among clouds in a complex and curvilinear organization. This is an earthly and corporeal paradise; the figures are profoundly human, with carnal bodies, voluminous and dense; the fabrics drape down in folds, sometimes loose and other times rigid; the clouds are dense and darkened, sometimes anthropomorphic. The fabrics, characters, and clouds occasionally become indistinguishable from each other. There are two sketches of the painting that ended up at the Doge's Palace: the first one is located in the Louvre Museum —a version in which the relationship with Dante's circles of Paradise is even more evident— and the second, in the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid. The latter is closer to the finished piece.

4

In *La celebración de la pintura* [The Celebration of Painting] (2023-2024), Cardozo revisits the still life genre, where the background is nothing but a pretext, without spatiality or perspective, produced using oil paint on a canvas. A dense oil painting, sometimes even painted with a palette knife to imprint its trace and thickness. The gesture of the hand and the paintbrush is curved, twisted and full of quasi-mannerist or neo-mannerist folds. The objects and elements portrayed come from the world surrounding the artist, sometimes they are *naturalia* and sometimes, *artificialia*, which coexist without clashing scandalously. However, one element that remains constant and recognizable in Cardozo's work, aside from a certain approach to brushstroke and aesthetic halo, is a low-key, bluish color palette that uses impasto and blurred edges, one of his most masterful traits as a painter. This series revisits art history, the above mentioned genre, as well as the fleeting nature of time. It includes both life and death; matter decomposes decadently, finding beauty in the passing of time. In addition, it strongly contradicts the tradition of the most archetypal nature mortes, full of abundance, prosperity, harmony, and sumptuousness, as Cardozo's incursions in the genre are austere, decadent, and stripped down. Although there is a certain harmony in them, it does not subordinate itself to the canons of beauty, but rather encourages introspection and reflection.

[P. 39]

ABOVE

Tintoretto (Jacopo Comin), *Paradise*, c. 1588
Oil on canvas, 68.7 × 194.5 in
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza
© Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza

THE VEIL

The third instance of the installation consists of *the veil*, which hangs in the middle of the room. A light, translucent length of cloth made up of sewn-up gauze scraps. They are vestiges from the removal of the artist's atelier walls. A sensation of a pattern that shows as much as it hides prevails. This glaze offers a liminal space, it is the exact transition between the bareness of Cardozo's atelier walls and the vestments of the characters from Tintoretto's old painting. It is, also, an interruption or obstacle for a genuine encounter between these two artists and their body of work. The impossibility of fully knowing someone else reappears, there will always be a portion that cannot be accessed, no matter how hard we try, there is a sieve that colors our gaze and ability to understand and grasp the others in their wholeness.

The way the opposing longitudinal walls are lit allows us to see through this gauze, which appears alternatively heavier or lighter, and there are fragments at different heights. This composition, performed by the artist as he moves forward with the uprooting of his atelier walls, invites us to a game of seduction between the other two pieces. Almost as in a courtship, the scraps of gauze allow us to gradually unravel, adopting a careful and attentive gaze, the different pieces that are unveiled under a diffuse, whitish light. This curtain made of cloth appears before as a semipermeable membrane that invites us to get to know the artist and, in his reflection, ourselves.

Cloth has become extremely relevant in Cardozo's body of work, who, since 2018, has been working more and more on textile-related pieces. This acts as support for pigments as well as building a bridge with art history, weaving, and interlacing; it is the intervened surface, sometimes serving as a support and at other times as material for exercising creation. In this installation, cloth acquires multiple meanings. It is used on various occasions and re-signified through different permutations and movements. For the transfer of the mural, cloth performs an auxiliary function, assisting a procedure. But, then, this same fabric is sewn and turned into a collage, with scraps, fragments, and tears; it is darned, salvaged, and cared for to become a veil. Moreover, this is one of the elements drawn from Tintoretto's painting, but now as fold, volume, sculpture, and installation.

Restoration is a theme that hovers over the entire installation, which is evident in a multidimensional way. On one hand, and quite noticeably, there is the *stacco* treatment, which is one of the interventions performed within the discipline. On the other, one can see an act of restoration in the connections and ties established with the past, a restoration of time, with the history of art and painting, with Venice and its artists, from a contemporary, unique, Uruguayan perspective. In both senses there is a persistence of the idea of valuing and understanding the past as support, as a foundational basis, or as a reference anchor for the present.

The atmosphere prevailing in the Uruguay Pavilion is static, still, as if stationary, where a kind of warmth—typical of what we find familiar—converges with a dilapidated and decadent air that hints at the passing of time. This is a time for coming together, for establishing a dialogue, as well as a time for reflection. In this relational act, Cardozo gets to know and learns about Tintoretto and Venice as much as he does about himself, in what he recognizes or not while conducting that dialogue with the other.

Last but not least, the installation's title stems from an extensive and enriching conversation the members of the team held internally. *Latente*, according to the Real Academia Española dictionary, means «Hidden, concealed, or apparently inactive», an idea conveyed by the installation, which whispers, shows and conceals and does not allow us to see completely and clearly, seeking at some point to create a sense of disorientation and uncertainty. In addition to that, there is a direct connection with the human pulse, with life, with the beating of our hearts. *Latent* is a work of art that is alive, breathes, cracks, and evidences the passing of time, while it grows and develops with every step; it is a work in progress that continues to blaze a trail...