

## THE FRUITFULNESS OF CHAOS

*Ornament, figure and archaism: these are the three enigmas that vibrate in the works that Felipe Ortega Regalado is exhibiting in the Birimbao gallery.*

The works of Felipe Ortega Regalado (Cáceres, 1972) initially confront with three enigmas: ornament, figure and archaism.

None of the three is new in artistic practice and reflection. Exactly one hundred and twenty years ago Alois Riegl published *Stilfragen:*

*Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik (Problems of style)* in Berlin, subtitled *Foundations for a history of ornament*. In this work he reopened debate on ornament, a problem which at that time was considered definitely resolved. Thirty years before, Gottfried Semper, an architect (author of the Dresden Opera House) and art theorist, had put forward that ornament was a result of the combination of forms used in ceramics and textiles. Semper explained ornamental elements (attractive for their complication and presumed arbitrary features) resorting to a certain evolutionism: fixed upon simple bases, once their technique was acquired the forms were applied to objects and spaces with greater difficulty. At that time, given to admitting linear causal hypotheses, the idea was well received. However, Riegl was going to suggest something very different: ornament was, in his opinion, the result of what he called each culture's *Kunstwollen (will to art)*. He thus situated ornament within the capacity of different cultures to imagine and carry out forms, so that these last maintained their mystery. Ortega Regalado cultivates that disturbing aspect of ornament: vegetable forms (some evident, others microscopic, like those photographed by Blossfeldt), or vaguely zoological, fragments with echoes of gold or silversmithing or embroidery, suggestive images without doubt, but whose meaning can hardly be defined.

This takes us to the second enigma, *figure*. On paper, there is something that draws the gaze but to which we cannot put a name. They are forms resistant to the word and therefore we can only point them out. At first sight they look like symbols, signs of something, but we lack the adequate dictionary to identify them. It is only possible to *point them out*. Lyotard, in 1971, called this type of forms *figure*. They are not abstract patches, they actually make up a figure but it is placed beyond the external limit of language. That is why they can only be *designated*: one's finger shoots out to say simply *that there*. Ortega Regalado's ink drawing, with minute strokes, unveils forms upon paper whose identity eludes us, and when one can be recognised, it transforms itself immediately into another escaping our effort to label it and thus make it manageable. Only one's gaze is game to go once and again over a work that grows with harmony and evident rhythms, but keeping its secret.

Those strange metamorphoses refer us to the third problem, *archaism*, to wit, to the images fashioned in a dream by that mute artist which is desire. The accumulation of heterogeneous and changing figures (that make one think of the Freudian notion of overdetermination) turns out to be even more enigmatic when a ribbon, that runs through all of it, seems to unify it (as in *Trasteros {Junk Rooms}*) or fine strokes suggest a pavement that serves them as support (*Sobre la reconciliación 33 {On reconciliation 33}*), which perhaps refers to another concept of Freud's, displacement, another form of the work of dreams.

Because of all this, the exhibition turns out to be as attractive as it is silent: it resists the word but reclaims one's gaze. But in order to do this, it manages to attain a special climax with its enigmas, through the high quality of the drawing. One work called *Códice (Codex)*, in a room beside

the hall) shows something like the catalogue of elemental forms used by the author. It is interesting not only for this reason but also because it presents very diverse ways of drawing: patches, strokes almost as firm as calligraphy, exact stripings that model forms, fissures that design rhythms, soft chiaroscuros, diminutive forms accumulated until they form a construction, etc. Familiarized with that variety of strokes, it will be easy to pass from the strange figures without name and from the course of their sudden metamorphosis to their mainstay, the drawing, and to the diverse ways in which the pen traces the great map of the work on paper. It is this that gives the dimension of the most interesting aspect of Ortega Regalado's works: how his flourishes extend themselves on paper, modelling, almost carving it, until a new space is generated. From the chaos of possible forms, the drawing, like a seed, pushes forth little by little forms that do not *re-present* anything but which have the vigour of a new *presence*. Deleuze called this mode of understanding the fine arts *diagramme (diagram)* and this signifies, among other things, that the gesture, *the hand*, manages to open new and unsuspected paths to one's gaze. That is what these works do, justifying the title of the exhibition: *sin parabenos*, that is to say, without make-up or additives. That is the audacity of these drawings.

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