

Introduction

FUNDACIÓN BOTÍN

The 2017 edition of *Itinerarios*, the twenty-third since its inception in 1994, features projects by eight artists who work with contemporary media —essentially, still and moving images. While those artists were —as always— selected by a jury of peers and other art professionals who seek excellence at the individual level, the exhibition presents some of the happening trends in contemporary art making. In that sense, *Itinerarios*, while not being a themed group show, provides an interesting overview of how a new generation of artists works, and what seems to be core to their thinking and practice. Although there no longer are established schools or movements, and while cultural references tend to be increasingly multiple and diverse, one can still see how certain preoccupations, and indeed methodologies, recur.

These artists from Brazil, Cuba, Germany, Portugal and Spain share a practice informed by research and the documenting of that process. They explore the realm we inhabit, as would scientists carrying out experiments or archaeologists on-site excavations. They collect clues and traces, and then display the result of their processes as evidence of sorts. Many of those artists are also interested in producing or contextualizing their work using custom-made devices or technology that is no longer used by the mainstream. This perhaps enables them to dissociate their images from the ongoing flow we are exposed to, and to foster a different way of looking at them. Indeed, technology has somehow homogenized the production of images and their distribution: any kind of image may be captured with the same equipment, processed with the same computers, and displayed on the same screens. Furthermore, the advent of digital technology has profoundly changed the quality of the

images and, very often, high definition makes it hard to tell apart a photograph —assumed to be a true representation of reality— from a computer-generated image —more assimilated to 3D environments as encountered in immersive interfaces of all kinds.

In a world where everything tends to be increasingly abstract or virtual, it also seems as if the need to materialize their thinking process becomes core to many practicing artists today. Rather than representing the world, they seem to be inclined to demonstrate or perhaps re-orchestrate its materiality. If art is to offer a different perspective on what we still refer to as Reality, it is then important to remind ourselves that what we may take for granted may not be so obvious. It is noteworthy that in 2016, Oxford Dictionaries has declared “post-truth” to be its international word of the year. This adjective defines a state of the world wherein the narrative has become more important than the facts. More than ever, humankind is faced with the fact there is not one single way to analyze and grasp our world, and that objectivity may turn out to be a construct; this in turn produces a state of great confusion. Interpretation or meaning is created by means of elaborating narratives that may dismiss the importance of tangible elements. The materialization of thinking processes may therefore be an interesting answer to this era of “post truth” we have entered.

In the work of this year’s roster of artists, there also seems to be specific concerns about humankind’s relationship to Nature. The notion of the anthropocene, an era wherein the global equilibrium of the planet is permanently affected by human activity, seems to have gained prevalence over the

past decade. It is at the root of growing concerns about climate change, the depletion of natural resources, or the pollution of the air and the water. Some of the artists whose work is featured here seem to question the relevance of the art object outside the urban environment, and perhaps how culture in general has contributed to the abstraction of Nature, which in turn may have led humankind to act so irresponsibly. Can art practice be part of a clearer awareness of what surrounds us? Somehow, artists demonstrate that the field of art continues to be one where it is possible to carry out all kinds of experimental human activity otherwise impossible to justify in this world, beyond commonsense, reason or immediate profitability.

Fundación Botín is proud to have provided these artists with the opportunity to unfold a new project or further develop an ongoing one, and would like to thank them for their thought-provoking and excellent work.