

Cards about time by Silvio Mattoni

Translated by Fernando Rosenberg

Numerous, portable, miniature traveling cards that lead me to wonder to which curious collection do they belong. In a certain way, it is a journal; reflections, sketches of images and thoughts that arise every day out of someone's experiences. Who? Someone in a state of attention, in a state of continuous contemplation.

Whereas a photographer might be defined as a predator on the prowl of gazelle-like instants, I think Natalia Blanch does just the opposite. Although some of her cards, tokens that consign information, would appear as if they were executed in a rush, as notes taken on the spot, a slower, delayed, expectant temporality prevails in the series. The cardboard pierced by innumerable red threads, the trace of the stitches, beyond the metaphor they pretend to represent, point out to the vital duration of someone waiting. In this sense, the attention of a gaze stands in opposition to a seizing of what comes about. The long minutes when someone stencils a figurine with pins, someone shreds pieces of paper to make maps of our laborious, obsessive childhood, or sews blood tears that have been measured on the surface of a card deviated from its normal use, those long minutes are replicas of lived memory that must not be reduced to mere snapshots. A moment carefully contemplated cannot be an image but rather a displacement among the indiscernible folds of memory and oblivion. Therefore, when Natalia Blanch draws with whatever is at hand—pencils, ballpoint pens, watercolors, school children's colors—she always traces the instant and its dissolution into a passage, into what is displaced. Therefore the drawings made out of pictures of suffering, which journalism lavishes upon us without purpose or consequence, are transformed by Natalia into silhouettes, shadows, a retreat of the recording techniques to diffuse, handicraft ways. The photographed pain that had been abandoned to the oblivion of an iterative press, recovers in this manner a corporal intensity. Somebody has carefully taken time, somebody has put, during a day or two, the rhythms of her bodily existence to the task of copying, tracing, inverting, making chiaroscuro about what the photo seems to be showing, but that is disallowed the following day.

Natalia's day is not about information, but about patience that interrogates a mysterious destiny. And the interrogation will become the work, inasmuch as this destiny is not to be what is considered to be an artist, but rather a constant questioning, a paying attention. To question every day the essence of the day, to change what one is doing by asking what is to be done, might be an unsettling curse, a manic attitude of the sort that is usually attributed to artists; but I think that for Natalia this is happiness.

Crumbled graphite particles, or the trace of a blue pencil, or the relief that the repeated perforation of a pin produces in the paper, like the miniature of some geological movement, almost to the point in which the material gives way, these are not just modes of expression. Neither are they techniques to express a meaning, which would go beyond them. I think they are words, but not concepts. They are the materiality of words, their sound, each syllable and each consonant. The graphite dust adhered to the card is the implosion of a word pronouncing, almost inaudibly, an onomatopoeic sound:

'bum.' The girl that closes her eyes and closes them again in a different place outside of her face, and shows up again in more and more cards that record her dream, silently babbling: 'baby.' But also most of the words in Blanch's language, registered in drawings and in the sketches of an ethnologist who is also her own tribe, don't have a translation; we hear their music without this resolving into something like a title. At other times, the field notes point to possible words that the image would have pronounced. And I am not saying, metaphorically, that the images speak; rather that they pronounce syllable by syllable, whisper, murmur, like poems of a moment that they delay and multiply. Natalia Blanch draws, pierces, glues, sews, copies, and transcribes poems like cards.

In a different vein, quoted poems appeared here and there, verses accompanying images. But they are never reciprocal illustrations; nor do the words comment on what we see, nor the strokes, stains, silhouettes, point out to the meaning of what we are reading. No doubt, there is a correlation between word and image, but it is not in between them but in a different place, to which they tend and which needs time to break through. When that intuition that has kept behind the audible and the visible is insinuated, we read a broader

analogy, one that would be able to link, as Czech poet Valdimir Holan said, the tear just twinkling on the eye with eye of the unicorn with the dog's laughter.

If we read in some cards 'restlessness' or 'despair,' the images, the materials used could have said 'tranquility' or 'calmness.' But the meaning doesn't show up in the mischievous swing of the opposites--because nothing opposes less than two words or two images—but rather when one perceives, imagines that behind the patience that composes these dozens of cards lies an intense, ardent restlessness; when I think, who knows why, that behind these isolated, apparently devastated words like calligraphed or typed headings, beats a contemplative spirit, one that is able to confront pain without breaking down.

Postcards of an art to come, without grandiloquence, with whatever is at hand, whatever time one has available. Abiding by the time we live. A time for doing and going by, for growing and watching grow, not a monumental work that attempts to hinder the unstoppable. Natalia shows me that any sketch could be definitive, because it marks that pointed line in episodes, as little stones that we would gather along the nomad trajectory that is our lives. To define duration in that way, and the beauty that dwells in each being, each image, each little thing that doesn't last, is to surrender to the only possible work, that which does not and cannot have repetition. To be born and to die are verbs beyond our reach. The actions that we are assigned--to paint, to write, to be, to feel, etc.--are the true time. I see their footsteps, their striking trail of red thread against blankness, in Natalia Blanch's miniature, potentially infinite collection.