

New century: new forms, new actions



Every end of the century is a trauma. A trauma that predicts cataclysms because of the inescapable end, but also produces new forms, new attitudes and ways of doing protected in that of the beginning of something.

A society reinforced by waste, although it seems paradoxical, offers opportunities for rebirth, and such is the case of this new century in the Dominican Republic. In the late twentieth and early twentieth centuries, artistic creation will be nuanced by very varied issues, ranging from those related to uprooting, identity and nostalgia, to the reconsideration of the role and situation of the human being - and more specifically of the artist- in contemporary society. To this is added the idea of analyzing new spaces, territories and habitats, the exploration of new emotions, the incidence of the mass media and the bombardment of images to which this artist is subjected.

Regarding the link with memory, a very popular reference in previous decades, it transits from the testimony of what happened, narrating the fact without apparent elements of judgment, towards an obligatory conceptualization and intellectualization of the surrounding and historical phenomena, conditioning factors of the contemporaneity through an analytical parallelism of the circumstances that are repeated. In this sense, something quite interesting happens when contemporary creators distance themselves to dissect the subject and, unlike previous generations, do not pretend to atone for any historical fault, nor resolve the conflicts brought by others.

This moment can be considered transitional in the displacement or migration of meanings. The themes mutated. The symbologies have migrated into a different context. The roles have been exchanged and what once meant something, may now have disappeared as a thematic axis or approach, or have simply acquired another connotation.

At this moment some of the first compelling examples in contemporary Dominican art are produced in the transition from narrating to intellectualizing, conceptualizing on the part of the creators. The transcendence of this type of work resides fundamentally in that it poses the problem without the need to resort to the literal declarative narrative, and irrevocably capture the conflictive and irresolvable nature of the theme of violence, marginality, migration, abuse against women and children and many other themes that are reproduced in the creations of artists.

Determining works, such as the one shown by Jorge Pineda at 2002 at the Museum of Modern Art and entitled Interior Garden, serve as the archetype to talk about that transition. This work exemplifies the transcendence and implications of the transfer of meaning in contemporary Dominican art. The use of an emblematic hopeful image -the baptismal font of the Dominican patrician par excellence-, full of contact cement -material used by pigeons or street children to be sprayed- and on this fresh and deep-fogged material, the projection of a flower that dissolves in an effect that mimics the drainage of a toilet being discharged was highly powerful ... at the same time sublime. Interior Garden also questioned us about representation, art or the production of meaning and what is the scope of it and how it can transmit or represent a certain idea. This work is not so much about the religious image that implies the baptismal font, or the nationalist that implies that it is the baptismal font of Juan Pablo Duarte, as well as about the frustration and the Dominican dream handcuffs.

The presence of performance, installations and video art in biennials and national competitions is becoming more and more forceful. Thanks to the openings of these spaces we could see *A day in the life of Julie Ozama*, *Alette Simmons Jiménez*, *The Chupachup*, by Johnny Bonnelly, and the numerous performative irruptions of Yih-Yoh Robles.

Later, and it is worth to say that with full awareness of the environment-understood as language and context at the same time-and in a certain way as movements of resistance to the normalization to which artistic production had been submitted, and in response to a changing panorama where every day the borders of the artistic and the social were more blurred, and stimulated by agendas referring to identities, the notions of belonging, rooting and uprooting, cultural heritage and other elements in the arena in a prominent way at those moments, artists like Monica Ferreras, Quisqueya

Henríquez, Miguel Ramírez and others develop essential work bodies for the analysis of the "history" of contemporary art in our country.

It is impossible, then, to evaluate the impact of these "new" ways of producing meaning - installation, performance and video art - without also analyzing the ideological - or conceptual - directions of the society that frames them and of which they are responses. This is a complex issue that involves the very specific temporalities and materialities of the media that, for the same reason, have been poorly explored. Valeria Graziano put it clearly when she argued that art always comes "informed by reality and facts, but the way in which it becomes a 'informer' of society is often prudently left aside."

In recent years we have been witnessing the emergence of new ways of "doing" art outside traditional and instituted visions. We have observed how a network of critical and creative resistances has been created based on the commitment to identity and cultural diversity, institutional criticism and gender policies, which have given a differentiated, plural and multidisciplinary aspect to what up to this point At that time they were considered as the proposals of contemporary art. These proposals have been incorporating, little by little, a whole set of existential spaces and times, marginal or very intimate experiences that are key to the current Dominican existence.

It can be considered that there is an abysmal difference in the use and management of the instruments offered by art in previous contexts and those granted by contemporaneity. I raised once, referring to the field of meaning production in our country in recent years, that we were at a transitional moment in the displacement or migration of meanings. He spoke that the themes had mutated; that the symbologies had migrated into a different context; that the papers had been exchanged and that what previously meant something, may now have disappeared as a thematic axis or approach, or simply acquired another connotation. I think we could say the same thing about media and instrumental creative work.

This leads us to three fundamental elements in the production of meaning referred to the installation, performance and video art currently Dominican. One, the vocation, understood as the disposition or aptitude to face these artistic languages; another, the components or integral elements of the artistic discourses; and finally, the attitudes understood as the approach tactics to the agendas that enrich these artistic practices. My emphasis, therefore, on this approach to recent artistic production will not be historical or archaeological, but mainly diagnostic.

Taken from the Book *Braiding a History in Progress, Contemporary Dominican Art in the Context of the Caribbean*

Sara Hermann, Historian and Art Researcher
Leon Center Advisor