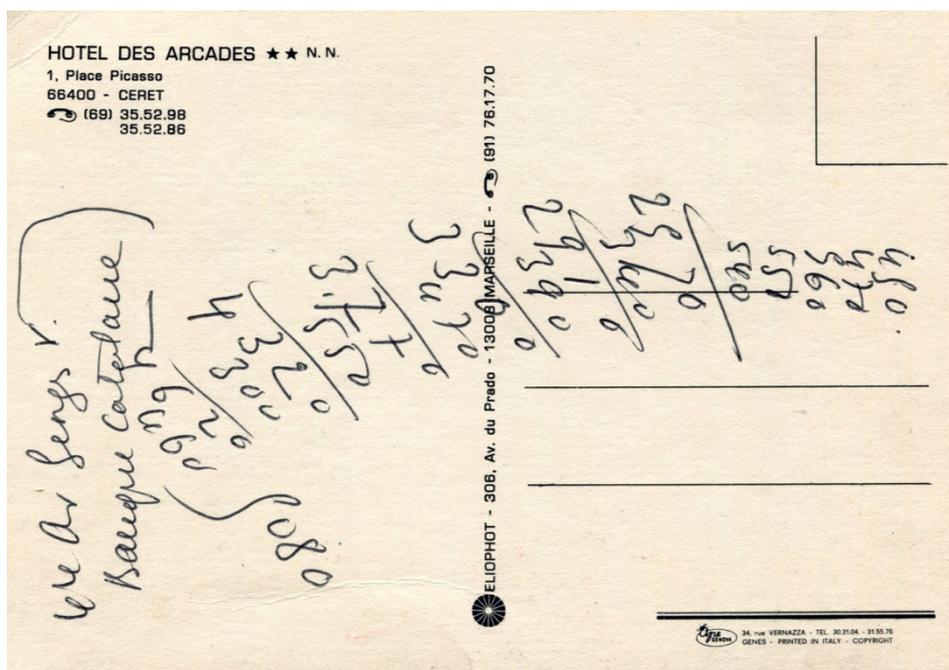


Galería Elba Benítez



ORIO L VILANOVA

Con los ojos abiertos en la oscuridad

November 2021 – January 2022

According to the branch of mathematics known as Set Theory, certain ‘sets’ — i.e., collections of individual components that share a common trait — are not members of themselves, regardless of the all-encompassing presence of that defining trait. The ‘set of all horses’, for instance, is not itself a horse, even though it contains horses and nothing other than horses: it remains a ‘set’, regardless of its purely equine content. This concept has been one of the key logical discoveries of modern mathematics, opening the way for the theoretical handling of investigations into other complex mathematical concepts; it also opens the way toward understanding a key aspect of Oriol Vilanova’s artistic practice, as can be seen in his current exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez.

Titled *Con los ojos abiertos en la oscuridad* (Eyes Open in the Darkness), the exhibition contains a selection of works that showcase the artist’s signature method of fashioning installations and sculptural objects out of traditional picture postcards of the type commonly found in flea markets and antique shops around the world. In the current exhibition, these include *Bajo cero* (2017 - ongoing), a large-scale, immersive installation of some 4,500 postcards of snowy landscapes beneath crystalline blue skies; *Celebración* (2020, 2021), a pair of mechanized and illuminated postcard display-stands bearing dozens of postcards of oranges and owls, and that, in their slow turning, enact a circular dance of light and shadow around the exhibition space; and *Al día* (2021) a numeric wall drawing that refers to the artist’s ongoing accumulation of postcards and that, in its koan-like simplicity, neatly captures the Heisenbergian futility of attempting an accurate measurement of something that is not at rest.

At first glance it might seem, in each of these works, that Vilanova's *materia prima* is postcards. Such a perception, however, is inaccurate, or at least incomplete: Vilanova's true prime material is not the postcards themselves but rather the *collection* of postcards, and moreover their *collection* in the dual sense of the word: the collected items themselves, yes, but also the *collecting* of those items, the *act* of collection. Thus, while the postcards themselves prove to be a versatile aesthetic medium in Vilanova's adept handling of them, and while they provide a remarkably rich font for possible critical and conceptual 'readings', the *collection* — the acquisition, the organization, the manipulation, the discovery and charting of meanings — becomes an artistic act in and of itself, and an artistic act that shares something of the performative (as perhaps all true creative acts do.) In other words, just as the 'set of all horses' is not a horse, these 'sets' of postcards achieve something very different from their handheld, rectangular, constituent elements: this is what might be thought of as Vilanova's own artistic "Set Theory," as posited in the exhibition *Con los ojos abiertos en la oscuridad*.

George Stolz

Oriol Vilanova's practice centers around re-contextualizing cultural artifacts — especially (but not exclusively) picture postcards acquired in flea markets — into contemporary art works that generate a critical and yet lively reflection on many of the issues of today's imagecentric and image-saturated culture. Beyond its conceptual complexity, Vilanova's work exerts a powerful aesthetic presence, most often in carefully orchestrated installations of postcards and nuanced sculptural objects that celebrate the persistence of the analog in a digital world.

Oriol Vilanova (Manresa, 1980; lives and works in Brussels) has had solo exhibitions at MACS Musée des Arts Contemporaines Grand- Hornu (2021); the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo, 2019); Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (2019); centre d'art Le Lait (Albi, 2019); Fundació Antoni Tàpies (Barcelona, 2017); CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (Madrid, 2017); M Leuven (2016); Musée d'Ixelles (Brussels, 2016); Museo Cerralbo (Madrid, 2016); Fundació Joan Miró, Espai 13 (Barcelona, 2013); Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2012) and elsewhere.

Con los ojos abiertos en la oscuridad is Oriol Vilanova's first exhibition at Galería Elba Benítez.