

Galería Elba Benítez



Ignasi Aballí

Palabras vacías

February – March 2020

“And yet nothing has been changed except what is
Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at all.”
Wallace Stevens, *As You Leave the Room*

A remarkable aspect of Ignasi Aballí's 35-year artistic practice has been its capacity to continually evolve through shifts and renewals of style, format and materials, while at the same remaining constant to certain core and lasting concerns. These include the search for ways by which to bring the impulses of a painter to the image-making process without recourse to the act of painting or even to paint itself; the incorporation of unconventional materials imported directly from the 'real' world into the art object; a skillful harnessing of the poetics of absence, transience, and ephemerality; and an embrace of the oscillatory instability that links language and image. All of this is evident once again in Aballí's current exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez.

Entitled *Palabras vacías* (Empty Words), the exhibition consists of two separate installations that line the entirety of the walls of the gallery's exhibition spaces. The eponymous installation *Palabras vacías* (2020) is composed of a continuous line of 27 metal stencils, all outlining words that refer in some way to states of absence or non-existence, such as unseen, hidden, invisible, erased, removed, stolen, unthinkable. The stencils, in outlining the outer edges of the letters, might be seen as 'containing' the words – or rather, containing negative spaces that communicate the words' semantic content. Absence communicates

absence; the image (insofar as there is one) is 'missing' and yet at the same time present. Moreover, just as the individual stencils demarcate the edges of the words, the continuous line of stencils demarcates the edges of the exhibition space itself, limning its 'meaning' by outlining its perimeter. Thus *Palabras vacías* refracts simultaneously across multiple operative levels of verbal and visual communication, effectively distilling and blending Aballí's long-standing concerns.

The exhibition's other installation *Línea roja* (2020) also presents itself as a kind of frieze wrapping around the exhibition space. The work is composed of multiple newspaper clippings in which the color red has been printed. The tones of red vary from clipping to clipping, and the clippings themselves are of a variety of different shapes and sizes. Nonetheless, they are conjoined into a continuous sequence, forming an unbroken but not uniform red strip that exercises a striking visual presence along the gallery's walls. Moreover, there are words printed on the opposite sides of the clippings, reversed words that can be detected but not easily read behind the red 'veil'. A red line is a potent and universal metaphor, implying prohibition, warning or alarm; and yet in *Línea Roja*, the power of the metaphor is shifted into more uncertain territory, lending the work a different and heightened complexity.

The deceptively simple yet masterful combination of complexity, depth and delicacy manifested in the exhibition *Línea roja* is characteristic of Aballí's entire *oeuvre*, while on another level the linking of modular-like but subtly differing elements into unbroken sequences in both works on view might be 'read' as an emblem of the constancy and change of the ongoing practice that has yielded it.

George Stolz

Trained as a painter, Ignasi Aballí (1958, Barcelona) creates work in a variety of formats, including language-based pieces, conceptually-oriented sculptures, paintings, photographs and videos. While rooted in the practices of conceptual art, Aballí's work does not eschew the power of the object, but rather stands out for its delicate handling of color and material.

Aballí has had solo exhibitions at the Blueproject Foundation (Barcelona, currently on view); IVAM - Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (Valencia, 2017); Museo de Arte de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia (Bogotá, 2017); Fundació Joan Miró (Barcelona, 2016); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid, 2015, 2002); Artium, Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo (Vitoria, 2012); the Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2010); Museu de Serralves (Porto, 2006); MACBA - Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2005) and elsewhere, and he has participated in numerous group exhibitions throughout the world. Aballí was selected to participate in the 52nd La Biennale di Venezia in 2007 and in the Biennale of Sydney (1988), and he was awarded the Joan Miró Prize in 2015.

Palabras vacías is Ignasi Aballí's seventh solo exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez.

The show will open on Friday, February 28th 2020 and will be accompanied by our usual ARCO brunch served in the gallery's courtyard from 10 am until 3pm.