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# Gareth Lloyd:

## Towards an Aesthetic of Dissent

María Esther Maciel  
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil

The now has converted into the topos of contemporary sensibility. Not a closed now where past and future are elided, but a moveable point of temporary intersections. Where the memory of the world is inscribed and erased. Where the senses migrate to the until then unexplored zones of the body. Where the margins and the center become a non-place. A space of small things, of detritus, of desires for impermanence. A time of cultural intersections. Consumption and waste.

If, within this perspective, utopian promises no longer trace the paths of the present, and the future cultivated by the historical movements of the avant-garde no longer occupies the center of the temporal triad, it is left to each artist to create his own way of looking, and with it to invent his own now. As Paul Auster says, seeing is a way of being in the world. And we might add: of leaving the world, to then find it again in a state of otherness.

Gareth Lloyd invents his now from a gaze in transit. A gaze that not only sees, but critically reads the time (historical and personal) in which the artist is inserted, and extracts from this experience a new horizon for his vision. In other words, the mobile nature of his work is justified by the attempt not only to capture, through images, some visual signs of the last three decades, but also to reconstruct a personal trajectory: one which he himself as an artist has sought throughout this period, in his intense but non-complacent dialogue with Pop Art, media iconography, and the aesthetic legacy of the modernist tradition. Through this experience he has known how to convert the look into a movement of traversing the limits of time and space, in search of a viable alternative sensibility for the present.

One may say that the way in which he undertakes this search is by putting on the surface of his pictures, in conjunction and disjunction at the same time, various modes of handling the question of image in the contemporary culture of the turn of the century. For this purpose, he makes use both of icons produced by the mass media and of some metaphors that modern poetry (more specifically those of Mallarmé) has left us. And he adds to this his own aesthetic proposal, which is simultaneously the sum and subtraction of the two other approaches. He manages to construct from this game of paradoxes a kind of visual narrative, through which he tells-in oblique ways-the story of the process of creation.



Perhaps the best way of showing how this narrative is constructed is beginning with one of the works in this catalogue, entitled "Two Icons from the Seventies." In it are found two fragments of two representative icons of the political/cultural clash between capitalism and communism during the Cold War. On one side, the supposed back of Clint Eastwood, one of Hollywood's myths; on the other, the arm of one of Mao's soldiers. Between the back and the arm, there is a strange symmetry, as if these parts completed one another in some way. And yet, there is a fissure, a gap between them. We might say that what separates them is also a kind of distance that unites them. Above these images, two others with no figure, almost empty, are placed, as if they were blank pages from a notebook or paper, for a drawing that does not yet exist. The background of the picture is dark, stained with chalk and water.

Without a doubt, the ingenious articulation of the two icons of the Seventies (both converted into stereotypes of a given moment of world history) point critically to an aesthetic mode of representation based on the ideas of identification and consumption. That is, a mode of representation which has its aesthetic appeal in the iconic image, canonized by the media of mass culture. And when I say critically, it is by thinking of the form in which this articulation occurs in this work, since the figures are not presented directly but metonymically, through fragments, as if when the artist does present them, he has already put them in a state of precariousness, of erosion.

On the other hand, the presence of disinhabited and denuded images suggests another possible path of representation: that which is sustained by Mallarmé's idea of silence, of the abyss, of the blank page/canvas, in short, of non-representation. Yet, a more attentive look can perceive that the surface is not so white, for it contains light touches, diluted spots, yellow pigments; and that the silence is traversed by small, nearly imperceptible noises. They seem to tell us of the impossibility of attaining absolute silence or nothingness, showing that purity is an illusion. In this sense, the artist also makes a critical reading of the aesthetic project of a certain current of modern art and literature: that which is sustained by the negation/destruction of reality and language itself, in search of something beyond the materiality of the form.

It is important to note that these two forms are not presented as opposite or mutually exclusive. They are superimposed, joined, making one relative to the other. In the simultaneous convergence or divergence between them, a new space and a new time are created for the image. Through the paradoxical game they engender, the artist seeks an alternative form for his own sensibility.



If this alternative form in the work in question still appears as a state of search, one may say that it will appear in a more explicit form in other works of his, as, for example, in the picture entitled "Slight Adolescent Girl". Here the icon is implicit (the traditional figure of the Madonna and child) and makes itself seen at first in the image from a package of soap-powder (put on the surface and stained with pigment). On the right appears a kind of blank, the slightly pigmented emptiness of an almost empty page. In the middle, another image already appears, merely sketched on a surface that is also stained, traversed by dilutions, containing an inconclusive,

ill-defined drawing of an adolescent girl. The lines of the figure are tenuous and dispersed. In it, the figure loses its compactness and weight.

The limits established between the three images bring them together in the same proportion as they distance them (as in "Two Icons of the 70s"). These images are also placed in a background with no homogeneity. The one in the middle, in which the two others are condensed and dispersed, represents the way of access to a new approach to the seeing (mediatized on the left by the consumerist appeal and on the right by the completely silenced appeal). This approach, which refuses the stereotype without destroying it, is the alternative that the artist offers for his time. "De-doxify" our cultural representations, without the destructive gesture that defined the so-called "tradition of rupture" is Gareth Lloyd's movement. He seeks to extract a modest figurativeness from the lightness and incompleteness of the line, without compression, without visual saturation, at the same time that he places this figurativeness in a dialogical relation with other models of representation of our culture.

To achieve this form, the artist traverses different moments in his creative process. If we distribute all his works along a diachronic line, by following the thread of this process we encounter what was called at the beginning of this text a visual narrative. In this narrative, we first encounter the works aimed at a direct confrontation with the figurative mode, proper to mass culture, which finds in Hollywood cinema its best expression. This confrontation appears as a challenge: how to critically deal with the logic of consumption that structures the representation of images in the contemporary world? Through the modernist path of rupture and aesthetic autonomy? Through the idealized path of abstraction? Aware that the modernist response to this conflict no longer suits the critical demands of the present, the artist chooses another path: that of erasure, of dilution. From this choice arise other works like "Icon," in which part of a photograph of a Humphrey Bogart type appears blotted out by another ground, in a movement of foregrounding the background. Little by little, the space of erasure (generally represented by the brightness of a intense yellow, such as in the picture "The Desert and Perspective") will expand in other works and completely obliterate the consumption and identification mode. At this point, the artist stages his own exile in the space of the uninhabited images and begins to explore the signs of expansion: the desert and the sea. Within this field, other associated images come in: sand, night, rain, and wind. They come in various works to show the ambiguity of edges, limits, given the near impossibility of making precise the point where these elements come together and draw apart. One may say

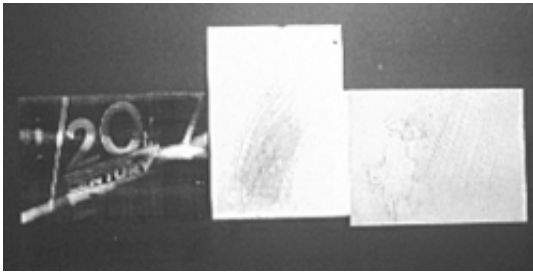


as well that in the works of this series an implicit complicity with the idea of loss is found. An elegiac but unsentimental atmosphere makes itself felt in some of them. This is the case, for

example, in "The Death of a Stereotype," where the image of a masculine figure (Richard Burton) appears partially diluted in black, on the dark surface of the background, beside a section of bitumen, simulating the gloss of film.

Disappearance, solitude.

The escape from exile is made by crossing the desert, a humble crossing: clandestinely, on the back of a donkey, in the morning rain. On the sand, the flower, the footsteps of an elephant, the features of adolescence, (transition) the lion. A new form insinuates itself, leading both back to earlier works like "Zephyr" and "Ellipse", and to a passage ahead of itself. The work "Leaving the Twentieth



"Century" is the creative response to this movement. It shows us how the artist, on leaving the century/desert, finds a new outlet for his own language and begins to take an alternative form from the contiguity of the prosaic and the backgrounded: girls/rain, toys/shadow, animals/blurs.

Objects sketched as incomplete figures, drawn out of the layers of the as yet unseen appear, whose function is not so much to represent, but to suggest.

If, as Italo Calvino would say, we live in a culture in which the all-powerful media can do nothing but "transform the world into images, multiplying it in a phantasmagoria of mirror-games images that are mostly destitute of the internal need that should characterize every image," it is left to the sensibility of artists like Gareth Lloyd to invent new forms of the visual apprehension of the present and extract from them an aesthetics of dissent.

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