Sergio Frutos

I come from Saragossa in Spain. My studies in painting and photography took me to Madrid, where I learned and professed these classical techniques. In the last two decades of my living in Berlin, I was experimenting with several techniques of artistic representation, combining painting with photography, realism with dream and media logic, mimetic and imaginary strategies for both: everyday life and digital images.

What's new?

I studied classical painting and photography in Madrid, a less experimental art academy than Barcelona, but also more preoccupied with teaching artistic techniques. This focus - on professing technologies of painting and photography and mixing them, which I do in most of my works, gives my work the appearance of documental practice, which is often not the case at all. Memory works in peculiar ways, making detours and twists, replacing the real with what seems possible at the time we think we remember events, especially those emotionally charged.

My task as artist is a rather modest one - instead of pretending to change the world, I undermine the spectacular logic of commodification by freeing the viewer, and myself, from the pretentious assumption that one photograph or painting will overcome capitalism. Such illusion is far greater in its imposing absolutism than any of my pseudo-realistic tricks. The trickstery of my images, building up to a version of archive, a room of peculiar curiosities from the life of a middle-aged painter and photographer, does not pursue the ideological path of fake radicalism. It is in the short glimpses of what might look like my memory snapshots, but could actually be anyone's memories, that the meticulous operation of technical experimenting with paints, brushes, light, photography and image meets the actual experience of seeing, always mediated by the structures of world-viewing ability we embody in the complex processes of shaping our cultural competence or *habitus.*

The various ways of challenging the spectacular logic of societies mediated by images, where the actual relations had been replaced by mere interfaces, and artistic disagreement to the commodified *status quo* - by a mere pretentious reproduction of rebellious gestures of the social movements from the past decades, clearly necessitate a critical response. My non-didactic, unusual, unobvious critical agenda is an effort to respond to those most general cultural and epistemic conditions.

How to reach me?

I work as individual painter, visiting the art fairs (Bilbao, Madrid, Kubo Show in Germany and others) and as member of the **Raum E116** collective, which I co-created.

What and how I do?

My artistic strategy in many ways resembles the work of an archivist. When I was a child, than as a teenager, I often assisted my mother, who worked as librarian at the University of Saragossa in Spain. The dusty paper catalogues, the micro-film viewers, the wooden drawers containing little flashcards with names of the authors, titles of the books, years and places of publication and all this arranged in UDC order became to a large extent the structure of my own memory and artistic expression.

My painting started as a necessity to reflect, express and somehow document the world around me as well as in my head. As any form of art, painting can be taken as a symbolic expression[1] of the society that creates it, as a collective, and of the world that surrounds the artist as individual.

As a son of a librarian and a philosopher, very soon I felt the urge to work with, register and archivize the reality around me, as well as to understand it through my artistic practice, reflect upon it and change or undermine the way we see the world. If I paint a place, a person or an image, it is because I want the viewer to see the world in the way offered by my artwork, to transform the perception and experiencing of the world.[2] My art, as critical about extractivist capitalism, as it is of the nuclear family being its basic repressive unit, is not didactic. I believe in autonomy of the viewer and emancipated spectator. This seems important today, after decades of so called "engaged art" and "artivism", of which a large part sadly consisted in pretending to build radical responses to oppression without changing a single moment of the *status quo*, while capitalizing pretentious, heroic gestures and resigning from one of art's most central ability - that of inventing new ways of seeing.[3]

As a person with a migration background, the alienation, strangeness,[4] detachment, as much as my wish to pursue the visual experimentation, had some severe implications on my economic status, and in many ways permeates the art I am doing. It sometimes sarcastically, sometimes - naively, undermines the sense of certainty, agency and choice understood in the ways shaped by what came to represent the Western individualism and subjectivity.

My attention has always been centered on how we deal and archive the records, based not on the official and regulated historiography but on what happens on the margins, on the non-places that coexist on the borders of knowledge. What interests me is that intrahistory,[5] that everyday life that is written (or very often, not written) by the excluded, the pariah, the weak.[6]

My paintings series at a glimpse

The first series I developed, ***Night Owls***, explores the cracks and disturbances in the fabric of the society of spectacle, where some watch and some are watched,[7] and continues in ***Fake Diary*** as a fictional diary compiled from personal experiences, autoreferential, but also alienated.

In the series ***Parallel Lines*** I aim to trace cuasi-impressionist depiction of parallel flows and memories in different generations and circumstances, from personal or familiar moments to the vibrant Berlin art scene.

My focus on marginal ways of expression pushed me to explore the interstices of the early online video chats, where small communities shared anonymously, in a voyeur-exhibitionist dialectic, their intimacies, their non-conforming bodies, their desires. This experience led to the conception of the series ***Live Show*** and, after the pandemics, with the increase in virtual relations and the expansion of dating apps, the large project ***Digital Intimacies***. Both introduce the naked bodies, sex and intimacy to my artwork. Candy-like, sweet colors are also present there, shifting the attention from public display of nudity to a sense of breaching privacy of random people's lives and households. They introduce the technology of painting and photography to the area now dominated by computer screens and precarious internet connections - those interhuman as well as these between machines.[8]

The more personal approach evolved in the series ***Vallibierna***, where I worked from dia-films of my father, shot in the 1970's in the Pyrenees, which depict the valleys then empty and wild and now crowded with tourists, as well as the glaciers that don't exist anymore.[9] The series ***Super 8*** moves around old family movies we are not able to develop anymore due to obsolescence, which perhaps despite their (un)reproducible nature keep their "Aura" intact.[10]

My librarian interests compelled me to engage in a more archivist approach. The early XX century concept of Cabinets of Curiosities inspired me to create my own collection of rare, personally interesting objects in the paintings of the series ***Natural History***. In them, I intend to bypass the official, colonial[11] core of the original museal European collections. Those were found objects, personal belongings with a particular story, and images found in natural science museums archives in Europe.

In ***Vanishing Point***, the technic of airbrush is used to enhance this blurring and bleaching of our memories. It is a personal, intimate view that started when I came across a series of images of vegetal specimens at the Botanical Garden, taken during my mother's last visit to Berlin, when she suffered a retinal detachment. Her disturbed vision turned everything blurred and foggy, which is how our memories inevitably vanish and fade, no matter how hard we try to retain them,[12] and how quickly also the grayness can extinguish color, how it can tacitly gaslight the plain perception.

The grayness transported me to other territories. I developed the project ***Atom*** when I came across archive photographs of atomic tests and realized, how the atomic age was humanity's turning point[13] and how easily our species' stupidity can destroy the world we live in.[14] One good example of this human-caused extinction, is that it is no longer possible to manufacture on Earth steel free from radionuclides for certain sensitive scientific instruments, it has to be taken from shipwrecks sunken before 1945.[15]

After the pandemic and researching bizarre chemical and biological war developments, and examining the human enormous capacity of normalizing and banalizing the barbarism,[16] I started working on the series ***Stranger Times***.

It represents that uneasy tendency perhaps most poignantly, as it harasses the sanctity of the family, the society and the bourgeoisie, suggesting that any nostalgia we might have for their old, solid versions, should be abandoned, as according to two German and one Brooklyn's classics, "all that's solid, melts into air",[17] and sentimental attachments are neither helping to stop this process, nor to emancipate.

In these projects I focused on the strangeness that invaded me while contemplating the beauty, the horror, the absurd of some breakthrough human scientific advances and its subsequent and monstruous technological implications. There is why some wise aliens in Isaac Asimov's novel do not allow humans to join the galactic senate, while mumbling "Silly Asses".[18]

1. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*.
2. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*.
3. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.
4. Kallifatides, *Un nuevo país al otro lado de mi ventana*.
5. Unamuno, *En torno al casticismo*
6. Majewska, "Contesting the canon by means of weak resistance. How to re-claim minoritarian heritage?"
7. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.
8. Majewska, *Coronafuga*
9. Vidaller et al., "Toward an Ice-Free Mountain Range."
10. Walter Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*
11. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*.
12. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*
13. Crutzen, "Living in the Anthropocene: Toward a New Global Ethos"
14. Vettese, "A Marxist Theory of Extinction."
15. Conway, "The Eerie Story of Low Background Steel"
16. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*
17. Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*
18. Asimov, "Silly Asses", *Buy Jupiter and other stories*