

*Fifth Column, recent paintings* at Klaus Steinmetz Contemporary, 2014.

In his most anticipated book, *After the End of Art*, the late philosopher Arthur Danto quotes Immanuel Kant as having inspired Clement Greenberg. Greenberg sees Kant as a philosopher that “does not add to our knowledge” but rather “criticizes critique itself”. Greenberg then proceeds to apply this reasoning to painting: painting does not represent “things” anymore, but rather, it represents itself. This stands as his hallmark for defining modernism and particularly modernist painting. But... alas! There were those rascals, the surrealists, still subscribing to representational painting to produce narratives.

After that, the twentieth century unfolded and we arrived at a point in which by all accounts “isms” are not only gone, but also impossible. Or, to quote Mr. Danto again, *The Age of Manifestos* is over. A broad range of possibilities opened up; one in which artists started to see past styles and art as a stylistically loaded shopping center. The main problem painting encounters today as ART, resides in its genealogy. In other words, being next to sculpture and drawing as one of the oldest art manifestations; it has run its course as an original art form. STYLE is what's left and even at that, a hybrid style that borrows heavily and shamelessly from past ages, foreign cultures and whatever is available visually including media, for example.

Emanuel Rodriguez is a western painter. It does not matter that he comes from Costa Rica and lives in Germany today. He has been trained in the Western tradition of art. The fact that I started this brief essay on his recent paintings quoting Danto, is no coincidence: Rodriguez's work clearly represents the ideas Danto's essays and theories have spawned. The long western tradition of mimesis in art had stated that mastering the trade meant achieving the most believable representation. Then, modernism proposed an alternative reality, one that had to be constructed or “seen” AFTER the object itself.

As we arrived at the “end of art” or “post-historical art”- again to put it in Danto's terms - this reality looks fragmented, mirrored exponentially in media and even more so after the advent of the internet. In a way images have lost their power, at least their power to surprise us. Their endless repetition and overwhelming presence makes us somewhat immune. A painter like Emanuel Rodriguez embraces this reality, and rather than resorting to shock - a strategy that worked for a while a few years ago - Rodriguez's efforts are turned to the possibilities of a “visual promiscuity” by means of merging different painting styles. Collage is the obvious resource used in his pristinely painted canvases. These paintings are a disparate array of images ranging from consumerism to abstract expressionism and from vintage memorabilia to color field painting. He is also capable of modulating the tone of his notes from quite loud and strident to almost mute or silent.

Looking at his recent paintings and noticing that most of them lack a literary reference (the paintings are untitled) prompts two immediate conclusions: the painter doesn't

want the viewer influenced by a reference outside of his painted constructions and also that we all must look into this body of work and add our own impressions and experiences to derive meaning. In this sense, his paintings are very challenging. Certainly, a lot of abstract paintings use the same strategy but since they are devoid of any concrete reference, it is easier to make associations.

Another rather surprising fact about his paintings comes from the subtle and almost invisible notion, at a first glance at least, that these paintings don't give away any particular indication of the author's origin. To put it in other words, there is no immediate reference to Rodriguez's identity. This is significant: one of the heaviest tolls weighing on young artists from Latin America is the dead weight of identity. More and more, artists are disenfranchising themselves from any particular identity that may carry a label. In this regard, his paintings could have been done by a Danish or a Japanese painter. Nothing in his work even remotely suggests that the artist comes from Central America, a region labeled as exotic and paradisiacal, but also known for its intermittent wars, conflicts, US interventions and violence.

This is a choice Emanuel Rodriguez has made. It may be argued that this could turn into a double edge sword: on one hand it allows the artist immense freedom, as he no longer has to wrestle with the burden of carrying a label (i.e. Latin American artist) but on the other hand, now it is completely up to him to create a narrative that doesn't support itself upon his past cultural individuality.

And that I believe is the challenge this exhibition tackles with great competence.

**Joaquín Rodríguez del Paso, CR, 2014**