



JUAN UGALDE

***Mental collages and other matters about the cingulate cortex***

From November 20th to January 29th 2021

The artist Braco Dimitrijević states that, observed from the moon, there is no distance between the Louvre and the zoo. For a similar reason, perhaps, Juan Ugalde has been playing for more than forty years to level out what we still differentiate as high and low cultures, a division that Vázquez Montalbán already challenged in the late 60's when he said that «programmers of the divorce between elite culture and mass culture will die under the weight of elite culture's massification. »« Polke, Salinger, Zappa, the Japanese, the Indians, La Mancha, the Chinese, Bosch, the illiterate, chance, whether we like it or not, everything has to do with everything. » At least this is what Ugalde used to say back in 2000 while introducing an exhibition, or maybe describing a working method that explored a lot of that. But of course, all of it came from far back, and it is perfectly visible in the way he and his colleagues at Estrujenbank were able, at the end of the 80's, to go from theoretical enquiry to satire in his observations regarding topics of varied nature: the countryside, AIDS, the guillotine, illiteracy, or macroeconomics, among others.

Estrujenbank also used to say that «every nostalgic return to the past is a symptom of fatigue towards the present and, at the same time, an alarm signal about something that is disappearing». *Mental collages and other matters of the cingulate cortex* is presented as a body of work that, although in its inaugural stage, works by following the inertia not of many of those concerns that Ugalde, Cañas, and Gadea referred to, but of the way these were approached. Years and decades have passed, and the romantic notion of Global Village coined by McLuhan in the early sixties has been taking us towards the worst possible case-scenario. That is perhaps why the figure of the illiterate, already reclaimed by Bergamín, it is today more necessary than ever as a tool to keep imagination alive.

A quick search allows us to find out that the cingulate cortex is located in the brain, and that *is everything that surrounds and sits on top of the corpus callosum and, therefore, is part of the frontal lobe*. We also discover that its purpose is to solve the emotional conflict by suppressing the activity of the tonsil and its outbound connections. To Ugalde, these mental collages are some sort of workshop cleaning, because workshops are cleaned with brooms, but also with psyche, and this accumulation of ideas whose origins are scattered along the last three decades are an

attempt to relocate many of those images partially built with memories, with his own and other people's photographic archive, and partially with scenes displayed and augmented in all directions, which is what drawing and painting have allowed him to do to so far.

Perhaps it is that tiredness towards the present what has led him to rummage through what still remains from before, and also maybe the fact that appealing to that emotional filter that is the cingulated cortex, or gyrus, is actually a shield to protect him from himself, be it through the deep knowledge of the way in which our brain achieves to dilute the images that belong to the consciousness with the subconsciousness, or be it the way in which a boy closes his eyes to avoid being seen. Seen or unseen, the question is that these new works by Juan Ugalde are surprising not by the way the drawings, paintings, and collages that make them up have been assembled, because this responds to, although taken to the extreme, the way he has always operated; nor are they surprising because of the non-specificity of each one of his pieces in relation to the whole, because there has always been a lot of that too. They are surprising because of their/his ability to continue rummaging, to keep on establishing unlikely links that, more than taking people aback, appeal to the insight of a viewer that thinks they had seen it all. Each of these new painting is like an experiment table full of spare parts, and new possibilities emerge from them and conjure up a childish smile in us.

If we took a few minutes to think about a painting by Juan Ugalde that we have recently seen, or that we remember for some specific reason, I doubt that there is not a temporal, geographical, or political disconnect that turns, just to give an obvious example, a neighborhood into a golf course, or a palace's interior into a roadside bar. Ugalde's painting has been equally influenced by both comic books and picture galleries, rock music, and high literature, but that is not what is important, since all the historic avant-garde somehow mixed those mass and elite cultures Vázquez Montalbán was referring to, but what is truly commendable is having achieved its dilution through the elimination of strata, knowing to be in places so diverse, passing through them as another one and giving everything a weight that equates them. In that way, facing the image that his work reflects, one could assume that perhaps *13, Rue del Percebe* has been more important in this country when it comes to training the critical thinking of a generation than the faraway effervescence of the *generation of 1868*.

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