

LA MEMORIA IMAGINADA

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-fragment from the original text, written for the show at EAV, Space of Visual Arts, in Murcia, Spain, April-May 2008-

Neurones, milliseconds, obsolescence and things in use

(...)

I go back to the origin of the past, which is equally to go back to the present, and also to the future. I go back to an intimate and universal geography, mapped by these images, by these objects, by these documents, that is on both sides of the body of whoever conquers and constructs it, of whoever feels and perceives it: inside and at the same time, outside

Quintay

There is not the least doubt: when our individual consciousness begins to process, through its rough wet cerebral circuitry, any type of information which contains the idea-word “whale”, that it immediately establishes an analogy, a mental and memory link with our collective unconscious, which takes it irremediably to the literary idea-word “Moby Dick”.

The myth of the great white whale, ferocious, free and unattainable, has now become part of our imaginative world. Immortalized in the highly well known, book of the same title by the North American writer Herman Melville, it is nevertheless much less well known that the genesis of this novel took its historical reference from the story published in 1839 by the New York magazine “Knickerbocker. Written by an official of the US navy, Jeremiah Reynolds, it tells the real story of a clash between whalers and an albino sperm whale known as Mocha Dick near the isle of Mocha in Lebu, Chile, opposite the river and present-day town of Tirúa. Like Moby Dick, he escaped numerous times from his hunters over more than forty years, with the result that he carried various encrusted harpoons in his back. The whalers told that he used to attack furiously, with such puffs that formed a cloud around him; he charged at the boats, holing them and capsizing them, killing the sailors that dared to confront him. According to the mariner who told the tale published in the magazine, it required an alliance of several whaling boats from different nationalities before they got to kill Mocha Dick.

But even less well known is the fact that in Chile, in the Araucanian Indian mythology, there exists the legend of Trempulcahue, rediscovered by the historian Tomás Guevara in 1898, after having been cited by the Jesuit Diego de Rosales, in the 17th Century. Four whales took the souls of the Mapuches when they died to the isle of Mocha, from where they departed in a funeral raft towards an unknown region to the West.

According to the legend the four whales were old women magically transformed into cetaceans, who undertook their task at sunset each day, but which no human being could see. Each soul of the dead had to make a contribution in copper ore (little stones of a turquoise colour) “that the aboriginals valued more than diamonds”, according to Diego de Rosales, and which they deposited at the side of the dead body, using them to pay for the services of the ferryman.

Luna Cornata

From the salt grains of silver nitrate which bathe the skin of emulsified photographic paper, sensitizing it to the light of the light, to other types of grains, in this case those of sodium nitrate, which dry the skin of the earth, Rosell tracks a metaphorical saline journey through the sea of memory.

And in the same way that the Sea-that wet metonym of time- throws up and deposits upon the beaches an incessant and motley universe of objects, detritus, remains and materials, so Life –another wet metaphor- also unloads onto the sands of (collective and individual) memory its particular accumulation of reminiscences, things, instants, minutes.

The mountain who eats alive men

Cerro Rico, called in Quechuan, Sumaq Urdu (“beautiful hill”), a mountain in the Andes famous for possessing, in colonial times, the most important seams of silver in the world. At some seventy metres high, the “Tío” –representation of the horrendous possessive demon or deity of the mines, to whom offerings are made in order to extract the metal from its belly – keeps watch, threatens, observes.