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# Juan Miguel Pozo

INTERVIEW

**What originally brought you to art?**

The more real truth, if you'll pardon the oxymoron, is that I started making art because I felt there was something flawed in me. Something like a structural breakdown in the interface between me and the world. Not a sharp, narrative pain—that would be easier to tell and turn into text—but a kind of persistent dissonance, like a background hum that no one else seemed to hear. Art, in that sense, was not a vocation but a kind of emergency emotional repair mechanism. One starts drawing because something hurts, continues painting because something is missing, and ends up hanging works in a white gallery because someone told him that this is what those who „make art“ do.

**What inspires you and is there a topic that keeps you busy - whether consciously or unconsciously?**

What inspires me? Perhaps the paranoid suspicion that everything visible is already encoded, that there is no innocent image, that every stroke is a veiled citation to something else: propaganda, trauma, desire, surveillance, abandonment. I paint as if painting could still be a cultural encryption device, an emotional zip file of entire centuries compressed into a texture.

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The question is not what subject matter occupies me. The question is: what network of subjects is activated every time my hand touches the canvas? And the answer will is—like any good conspiracy theory—multiple, dense, rhizomatic.
Because on the surface of my paintings, as in the classified documents that we never fully read, what is important is not what is shown, but what is suspected. There is a Cuba too, of course, yes, but not the postcard, not the red and white revolution. Rather a Cuba enlarged, edited, transfigured by the experience of distance, exile, translation.

**What is the most beautiful moment in the studio—and the most difficult?**

There is no beautiful moment in the studio. The studio can become a kind of sacred space of voluntary torture, where every visual decision entails an existential micro-crisis. There are days when painting seems to mock you, when any gesture is the wrong gesture, when even just being there—with the body present, the materials ready, the intention firm—is not enough to make
something happen. And worse: there are the days when you do make something happen, but you feel like it's meaningless. Like you're pushing shapes against a wall that won't budge. And you wonder if what you're really doing is repeating empty gestures instead of producing truth or beauty or whatever it is that's supposed to come out of art. It's a very uncomfortable place: being technically in activity but emotionally in airplane mode. And yet—and this is the most fucking complex thing of all—you keep going. Because between the despair of the bad days and the timid epiphany of the good days, something is formed that is neither inspiration nor punishment, but an ethics of the attempt. And that ethic—however worn out or ridiculous it may sound—is the only thing that resembles, at least in my case, to having a reason to be alive.

**Do you have rituals when working—music, coffee, chaos or order?**

More or less. Although to call them rituals would be to grant them a dignity they do not have—as if they were conscious, almost monastic practices, when in reality they are domesticated manias, low-intensity superstitions disguised as routine. Yes to coffee, of course (if by coffee we mean a pharmacological way of keeping existential doubt at bay). Yes to music, but only that which repeats, which drones, which anesthetizes the consciousness without activating specific emotions. Order in theory. Chaos in execution.

**If you didn’t paint, what?**

If I didn't paint, I would write. Or I would clean compulsively. Or I would become obsessed with something useless but infinite, like cataloging all the mistakes I made before I turned thirty. I would make lists. I would read things I don't understand. I would get hooked on ideas that don't serve me. I would construct some version of myself articulate enough to avoid having to confront the real version. Because without painting, the mental noise multiplies. There is no frame. No form. Just overflowing content, overlapping thoughts, anxiety with philosophical pretensions. And without that translation into something visual, something tangible—without the gesture of moving the hand and seeing something appear where before there was nothing—everything stays inside. Going around in circles. Fermenting. So no: if I didn't paint, I wouldn't do anything else. I would lose myself. With style… perhaps.