



Foto: Agustí Torres

## Miquel Barceló, the whole, wholly self-engrossed

**“I am in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now.”**

Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (1951)

Arnau Pons

We are not exactly faced with a newcomer abstraction. Nor are we faced with a new language of signs either. Miquel Barceló’s adventure is actually closer to a reformulation. A second birth that doesn’t displace what was already there or already exists. It is the emergence of an adjacent universe rivalling ours. Blows below imagination’s belt. With the power and thrust of concrete things, of all things endowed with life that desperately attempt to prolong that life, in order to defer a standstill. It is the fierceness of the work that constantly aspires to outstanding and unqualified totalisation. As if it wanted to encompass everything or, better yet, as if everything were seeking the authenticity of a second existence. As if the painter wanted to paint everything painting can possibly say. To the point of strangling painting itself. To the point of packing museums. Perhaps even to the point of depleting sources. With his eyes always trained on capturing the last drop to fall. It is understandable that the artist plays at being the master of drifting drops. For the same reason, he doesn’t keep himself from demonstrating the skill of a splash. With a trickle always about to run and throb. By sweating from within. Quivering life dripping. Until

it finally oozes the threadbare and tentacled nature of each and every thing. And all blood streams towards the ink holes. To spew clouds of darkness like an octopus. To sink deep down. To be a whirlpool. A liquefied reflection. Or unexpectedly make the saliva of the dead flow. Channeling rims. Calming liquids. Enfuriating oceans. Being the only faucet, always out of order and relentless.

It is all in the soaking of his brush, a specific weightiness, that moves smoothly and thickens lightly, drenching the paper. An invitation to the voluptuous. Teeming paint. Paint that attempts to maintain its fluid state, foreign and alien to all shorelines, to all forms of limitation or stoppage. Illuminated foam and disrupted senses when the Rimbaudian ocean breaks against me. Because all things must also be read. And with the gesture of turning a page all books will be dragged along.

All the work seems to be oriented, from the very beginning, toward this profusion of sap and juices, toward this craze for seepage and floods, toward this feat of waves and thirst, without ever losing sight of what stones, rare paradoxes, the collision

of contraries, and anomalies contribute. Water inconstancy is the starting and finishing point for examining the pluck of everything. Here lies the origin of the dripping portraits of albino blacks, the friendship with a blind photographer, animality as an extension of humanism, the cathedral and the atheist, termites that are builders as well as destroyers, mineral life, the scholarly farmer, the spinning and stationary vortex, the diverse fictions of the Cross (or the crucifixion of beasts), fruitful death, foreseen and long sought-after immortality. The light of masks and soot. Night floods.

It is a question of leaving the paint pot empty. Completely drained. It is only then that the brushes can come alive and start to slink about with the slow ease of a cat.

The artist himself briefly said as much in one of his African notebooks: “De-re-paint it all” (Mali, 26-XI-1994). It is the tension between that which has been painted and reproduced, celebrated and recreated time and time again, successively contemplated and valued in a museum or a church, and implacable or unconditional revocation. A revocation that at the same time means to be, and very consciously so, a penetration, an overstepping, an overcoming. The stick that goes through the broth of the soup is a metaphor for transcending. A kind of survival in the far corners of art, in the folds, nooks, backside and outer extremes.

Both the challenge (thrown back to past) and the ambition (facing the future) will be a part of this unspoken invective. Because there is also the staging of this whole struggle between reply

and counterreply, taken to the extreme. Until recently, perhaps no one had taken it so seriously. This is the grim side to revolutions. In the end, pictorial form, on every canvas, starts to struggle with history. Vastness demolished by the artist’s brushes and buckets. Yet even when the work is hushed, silence cannot be heard. The bareness, the decomposition and the sordidness will also attain a peace of sorts. As if in each image or each piece eternity wished to keep changing backgrounds again and again. As if renown wanted to disabuse itself of vanity, as if it wanted to free itself from inefficient and unresolved externalism, and tried to find footing among earthly things. With a sense of perseverance that stems, in fact, from the curse of those who can’t be stopped, or of that which can’t be interrupted. It all takes place ceaselessly. Everything becomes possible. To stab the sun. To decode mothers. To live the ages of earth. To strike the keys of masterworks. To carry art piggyback.

Ideas never come alone since they are always joined by a host of other members. Then what is expressed is no longer ideas, but members. Elements and whims that fight among themselves. The same as eternal punishment in Dante.

If, in the end, the painter, thinking he has descended into hell, settles for reaching deserts or the highest peaks, or hides away in grottoes over cliffs, in order to paint, it is because he wants to conjure up his own immortality in this life, before giving his work up to the bends or drifts of reception, or the scorching by eyes, before even knowing or guessing which canvas will be his last ||