

UR AITZ

In 1962, Joan Miró explained that seeking to give such an individual quality to the pictorial expression had made it almost anonymous, thus achieving the universality of the act. The Catalan painter noted the fascination awoken by the shapes and elements of nature. However, unlike the Romantics who created large landscapes highlighting their immensity, Miró based his work on the experience of the small or fragmented, using sinuous and organic shapes.

Jon Cazenave's work is halfway between the Romantic spirit and Miró's searching. His work contains a vehement impetus rooted in the Romantic tradition that addresses nature from his experience, from his emotional and subjective interpretation, but resorting, like Miró, to small shapes and signs. The starting point for Cazenave's work was the Basque People. However, as his discourse has evolved, this theme has become more diluted and shifted towards the more personal: even though the initial questions raised were universal – the origin, culture and identity of that People –, they have gradually become a pretext to seek to explain both his position in that context and himself.

The *UR AITZ* exhibition stems from the earlier *AMA LUR* project, where the aesthetic experience of the land, a motif that the whole of the work likewise conveys, is approached from a double perspective. On the one hand, from the point of view of the matrix, of the earth as Mother Nature – as the motherland – and, on the other hand, from its connotation as matter. Both perspectives encapsulate the enigma of origin as one of their main questions. The genesis of the universe and of man, along with the origin of artistic creation are depicted in the work of the artist by means of an aesthetic which, in itself, also encapsulates that dual nature, coming the presence of the creative force of the natural elements – the expressive strength of the photographs conveys the power of the germinal, displaying the explosive nature of the fertile - and the deployment of a human language that questions and is imposed on it.

Cazenave's search is, therefore, genesis-focused: delving into the cultural roots of the collective identity that is expanded to become intimate. That intimacy culminates in the encounter with the cave. Three key points contained in *UR AITZ* are reflected there: the earth – the cave as the womb -, the traditional cultural – the testimony of cave art to man's relationship with his environment – and art – the initial gesture that open and contains what that can be. Even though his impetus is rooted in the Romantic tradition, the artist manages to bridge the contemplative distance with the sublime of the landscape as what is shown is produced from within. In the cave, Cazenave shows that primal creative gesture: the dim light of the torch uncovers part of the wall, which is illuminated and reveals a bump in the rock that becomes the back of a bison. An analogy of that gesture with photography is thus established, which explains this shift in the author's work. His photographs – photography – frame a part of an unfathomable whole that enables watchful waiting as it is unveiled.

The experience of the cave, a cosy and intimate mineral embrace, heightens the bridging of the distance and the corporal nature of the aesthetic experience. The tactile, nearly sculptural quality is intensified to heighten it. And that step bridging any distance is what Cazenave performs when he converts the photographs into a medium - as was the rock wall of the cave for the cave artist - on which to intervene and repeat that primal act. Intervening on the landscape photographs with mineral pigments in earth colours, between shades of ochre and red, which allows him to move beyond black and white, is – apart from their powerful time and chromatic symbolism – simultaneously a tribute and ritual by means of which the artist tries to understand the nature of that repetitive gesture. The mountain, the main motif of this series, is depicted as a nearly sacred symbol. In the same way as the cave artist, the photographer identifies and intensifies certain shapes, and makes them reveal their buried energy. However, at the same time, it is a probe into his own work, intervening to open it up to new interpretations. The vitality and commitment to his work can thus be seen, that is an invitation to delve further into its nature, underscoring both the identity of the work itself and that of the author.

The author's search is a path, a route that is not only in time, but also predominantly physical. The photographer is also a passer-by in the style of Hamish Fulton and, as such, travels through a territory that is not only observed, but also bodily experienced, thus making the photographer into part of the reality in which he is moving. The photographer's ability to remain silent makes it easier to listen to nature which, in turn, leads to the appearance. And that appearance is none other than that of nature itself and its language, structured around its elements. His images display the organic and dynamic, whether in the explosion of the waves of the sea, in the attention to the furrow or, as in the *UR AITZ* mosaic, in the movement of the rhythms of the natural cycles based on the juxtaposition of hundreds of photographs of the swell.

Cazenave's work reverses the false dichotomy between man and nature, by making the shapes of one be recognised in the other. Thus, in his understanding of the land, the photographer notes both the first incisions and footprints of the first people and geological elements. His photographs feature organic, undulating shapes, which capture the energy force that, tens of thousands of years earlier, drove the search in that very place. Those processes to override the visual distance and to intensify the tactile and sculptural can be seen definitively when he incorporated stone into his work. The stones, round pebbles whose polished shapes confirm their age-old fate, are collected and subsequently worked on with the same organic pigments chosen for the landscapes. These stones are yet again the testimony of an aesthetic and bodily experience: attentively walking to the encounters. Their eroded presence subtly expresses a whole remote temporariness, while it indicates metonymically the whole experience of the route.

As the outcome of his research into the landscape and photographic intervention, Cazenave has produced a series of large format photographs, belonging to the *OMAJI* series using the Cyanotype printing system. In that process, the iron of the chemical compounds exposed to ultraviolet rays are transformed into blue shapes. The genesis-focus is dehumanised: the artist has taken a step backwards when producing these images and placing the paper on the shore of the beach that

leaves the greatest part of the gesture in the intervention to the waves, sand, salt and ferrous emulsion. Shapes converge on the Washi paper that are unveiled using the emulsion and the to-and-fro of the sea. As Hans Arp, the poet and painter, wrote, “sky and earth permeate” and, hit by the swash of the waves, “the blue blooms and fades, to flourish again”. The Cyanotypes record some of the infinite variations on a reproductive act that is no longer titanic, geological or uterine, but rather the intriguing reconfiguring into infinitive shapes that captures as a myth the birth of Venus in foam. The approach of the artist contingent upon nature again stresses its matrix characteristics. Yet the fascinating power of nature, a key aspect of Romanticism, lies in its both creative and destructive capacity, a dual quality depicted in the blue shapes in the making.

The creative capacity allows a type of metonymic landscape to be revealed in those shapes. And the landscape – where the French term *paysage* is sometimes used in art – is none other than how a place is approached, a way of looking at a *pays* (territory or country) from outside. However, Cazenave, by seeking to break down the Romantic distance of man in front of nature, gives the natural elements – fire, air, earth, water – the possibility of generating their own shapes and textures. Furthermore, the author slightly intervenes in the process by seeking to add geometric structures to the landscapes that again refer to the cave paintings. The irreversible result of the cyanotype tries to recover the power of the sensitive experiences offered by the contact with nature. A type of anti-Land-Art where the photographer avoids the transformation of the milieu in order to rather reveal it. The blue and white mountains that construct the landscape take on an individual standing, in the same way that the stones or furrows did; a way of showing the place as the keeper of substantiality, as a part of the deeper and broader reality than its representation. In the words of Jean-Marc Besse, “the landscape is also the wind, the heat, the climate, the rocks... a environment that existed before humans and that will outlive them in one way or another”¹.

The keys of the exhibitions converge in the colour gradation of the Cyanotype: from the matrix black of the darkness of the cave, the red of the earth, to the blue that opens up to the oceanic immensity resuming the idea of the landscape. By means of the intervention of the photographs and stones, along with the Cyanotypes, Cazenave combines the pictorial gesture with the photographic language to capture and reality that is both felt and depicted. This is all merely the experience of roaming, walking, observing or feeling, with the work the footprint of that experience. Inwardness and outwardness, present and past, the tangible and the intangible, fragility and strength, the measurable and the infinite converge in *UR AITZ* thanks to a language that manages to convey the strength of nature. A force capable of sustaining the ongoing search that is an artistic corpus that embraces intimate and universal questions that lack answers.

¹ Besse, Jean-Marc: “Las cinco puertas del paisaje. Ensayo de una cartografía de las problemáticas paisajeras contemporáneas” in *Paisaje y pensamiento*, Javier Maderuelo (dir.), Madrid: Abada Editores, 2006.