

Pan American Art Projects

The intermediate metaphors of Leticia Sánchez Toledo About Intimate Pauses

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In one of this show's paintings, *Veiled Light Awakens in Dreamful Reverie*, the artist has us witness the main figure from the outside; we are trespassers spying from the garden. Inside, a woman sleeps face down on some sort of settee. But, we cannot enter, even though the door is open. The light hits the woman's blond hair and filters outside, despite the artificial barrier of the glass wall. The work evokes a dreamscape—a curiosity of what she may dream about after the glass of wine that lies beside her.

Leticia Sánchez Toledo is an artist with an immense control over painting as an artistic language. I contend that Sánchez Toledo's newest work, on view here, sits between two points: a cinematic frame that she often emulates, and a reaffirmation of the static nature of painting. Sánchez Toledo creates a world of desire and curiosity that could easily be turned into a motion picture, but she leaves us in a still moment at the threshold of longing to see more of the reality she constructs.

Film captures our gaze and pulls us into a scene, moving with the rhythm of the editing, telling our eye where to look. We are taken into the diegetic world of the film and given the capacity to see what other characters can see. Painting, on the other hand, forces us to see the world from a static point of view. A painting preassigns the place of its spectators, and the dialectical relationship between them and the canvas is non-negotiable. Nothing is there to aid us, offer a close-up of important elements, or let us see from another's view.

Sánchez Toledo applies these representational principles with mastery. In her work *Alice*, for example, the spectator is inside a bedroom; this time the artist brings us up close to the intimacy of her characters. The woman is completely nude with her back turned to us. The man, clad in a bathrobe, shaves at the bathroom mirror. As both are faceless, the beauty of this scene is in its intimacy and the mystery of these unknown people.

In film, this intimacy would be fluid as the camera would follow the characters and perhaps cut to a different angle. We would hear the conversation and see the next moments of the scene. Film, thus, makes us active voyeurs, fulfilled as much as possible. Painting, however, condemns us to the role of a voyeur who can never fully be satisfied. Sánchez Toledo insinuates the movements but

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leaves them paused; an “intimate pause”— or paused intimacy, perhaps, for our contemplation. Everything the artist leaves out, we must imagine it ourselves.

The artist has stated that painting, for her, is a way of putting her own pause on the unyielding rhythm of contemporary life. The artist reacts almost like the Romantics did, frightened by the disenchantments brought on by industrialization. Today, she reacts to a hyper-postmodernity; a society of spectacle and consumption through social networks. Everything is quick, fleeting, superficial—a schizophrenic collage of overstimulation. Sánchez Toledo uses painting as an escape from this patience-free world in order to slow down, to breathe, and to open her senses to the details, subtleties, and gestures of her characters.

If we view all of her works in this show — the paintings, the small-format studies, and her pastel drawings— it is easy to see that women are her main protagonists. Sánchez Toledo’s work moves broadly toward an investigation of the feminine experience. She paints to depict how these women behave in simple banal moments, when they are not acting for anyone but themselves.

Sánchez Toledo uses sketches and studies as to not be capricious in her selection of images. The artist carefully selects the frame of the entire image with the intent to establish the angle from which our perspective is set at the start of her process. The design of the composition inside that frame is then the result of the artist's attempts to capture life’s fleeting moments and the relationship between spaces, people, and objects, a clear reflection of her academic background in design.

Emotions and drama come from a psychological use of color. The artist takes advantage of the expressiveness of light, warming and cooling the spaces, covering and revealing what needs to be seen— or not— with shadows. Her brushwork is smooth and thick, which one cannot quite define as impressionist, nor realist, nor expressionist. It’s a brushstroke many might associate with Edward Hopper or Eric Fischl.

The genealogy of artists from which Sánchez Toledo has pulled inspiration could even take us all the way back to the Northern Renaissance, with figures like Johannes Vermeer, with his descriptive interiors, female figures, and play on windows and light. Furthermore, Leticia Sánchez Toledo claims a space in the long legacy of female artists, including many of the women impressionists. She maintains at the core a close attention to femininity, everyday gestures and tasks that are simple in their beauty. She creates spaces for the simple and intimate delights, which raises her work to a level of play that is truly postmodern, a visual game in which painting exerts over the art of cinema a sort of power that lasts for a moment.