



ana júlia vilela the novel is dead

In the same way as painting, the novel has had its death declared countless times. Rubem Fonseca, in the chronicle that names the book that is a namesake to this exhibit, analyzes the novel's many assassins, among them the cinema, television, and the internet. Unlike painting, the author states that writers have always kept the novel alive -- or at least have tried to keep it breathing. Painters, on the other hand, are always the ones who have declared the death of their craft, trying to exhaust the ways of painting, the themes, the materials. Is there a way to kill something already dead? Do they both have seven lives like the cat?

The texts gathered in the book share yet another attribute with Ana Júlia Vilela's paintings: they are chronicles -- clippings of daily life, with doses of fiction and reality, easily relatable to the spectator's own experiences. Ana's paintings, however, can steal from the medical connotation of the expression which names the genre: it is chronic -- constant, permanent. The artist once told me that she never gives up on a painting. No matter how unfinished, Ana always finds a way to "make it work". Or is it the painting that never gives up on her, that fixes the artist? That lets herself be filled with layers, erasures, drawings until it becomes something closer, more intimate.

Ana Júlia Vilela's paintings inhabit a space between figuration and abstraction; between fiction and an experience; between her memory and a story told by someone else. Perhaps it is through this interface of in-between, this intermezzo, that it becomes possible for the artist to explore this multiplicity. In an attempt to organize so many differences -- figurations, texts, abstractions -- the artist also presents her paintings as installations, trying to unify, to contextualize the meanings between them. More important, however, is for the public to create their relationships, their correspondences -- be it by finding the figuration present in the artist's abstraction, or by reliving their memories and experiences.

This process of creating a present relationship with memory is a constant artifice in Ana's oeuvre. Each painting works almost like a page from a diary forgotten for a few years in the back of a drawer, hidden from the eyes of siblings, trusted only to the closest of friends. The colors, already quite desaturated, indicate a latent intensity, the blaze of reminiscing a feeling, the rehearsal of a conversation that hasn't happened yet, the smell of a lover which lingers on a pillow after a break-up. These are common experiences that repeat throughout a lifetime, but each time they recur uniquely. At each death of the novel, there is always another one rehearsing itself. Is it still a cliché to say that with each end, there is a new beginning? If so, fine.

Maybe the novel never died, just like painting. Maybe it died and was replaced by something else and no one noticed. Maybe painting is the new novel and the novel is the new painting? That painting has died, I have no doubt, just as I do not doubt that it is still alive, even if as something else. Ana Júlia Vilela insists on the painting and the novel. Maybe when she gives up on both, they will cease to exist for a brief moment, at least for her. I know, however, neither the novel nor even less painting has given up on her.

// Chico Soll

Text originally published for the exhibition *Ana Júlia Vilela: O Romance Morreu*, curated by Chico Soll. Fundação Ecarta, Porto Alegre, 2021.