

Miguel Castro Leñero

The Poetry of Images

Astrid Velasco Montante*

*He is no poet who has not felt the temptation
to destroy or create another language.*

Octavio Paz



▲ *Men Working VII*, 79 x 60 cm (collage and acrylic on workshop proof). Private collection.



Miguel Castro Leñero's personal archives

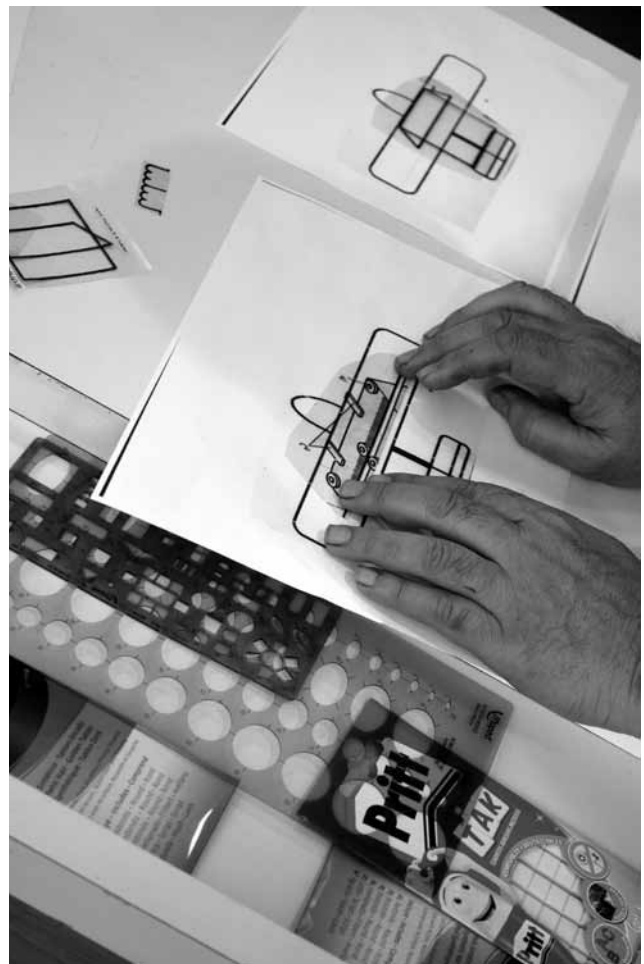
▲ *Out of Focus*, 92 x 80 cm each (triptych), 2013 (oil on canvas). Private collection.

The work of Miguel Castro Leñero includes graphics, sculpture, and painting and reflects a unique perspective and great creativity. This is shown in how he unfolds the possibilities of a motif on the aesthetic, symbolic, and technical planes, the result of his very special way of grasping the world.

The artist collects the materials he works with, and in so doing, reveals the humanity of things. However, his collecting is at the same time construction, creation. Anyone who knows him knows that he is an avid urban wanderer. And I say this because what he does is to navigate the city, where everyday objects and scenes take on new forms that, in turn, create new possibilities. On his walks through his Escandón neighborhood, he discovers materials for creation and re-creation on different supports and with different items. Thus, his visual finds are behind the aesthetic and material re-framing of an exhaustive oeuvre done in series (dogs, airplanes, houses . . .).

In his work, the synthesis and symbolic development that the image goes through in one of his series, as well as the move toward other materials, turn the object or subject represented into poetry. It is sometimes almost like a haiku that is re-designed until it explores the diverse possibilities of a

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Estudio Sagahón

▲ The artist working on his "Airplanes" series.

Miguel Castro's search has become a daily activity: he compiles images and uses them to build and rebuild others, which he gives meanings to.



Miguel Castro Leñero's personal archives

▲ *Dog with Sign II*, 56 x 80 cm, 2014 (single-print engraving in ink and crayon).

landscape. At other times, it is a complex allegory expressing itself with the simplicity of raised strokes on textures and, in the case of sculpture, in the volume and dimensions that the object acquires.

For Miguel Castro, his search has become a daily activity: he compiles images and uses them to build and rebuild others, which he gives meanings to that may be personal — a house as the representation of an individual corporeal reality, or of identity, or of a country, or of a world... — or, on the other hand, may become universal symbols that touch all human beings, thus acquiring the substance of archetypes.

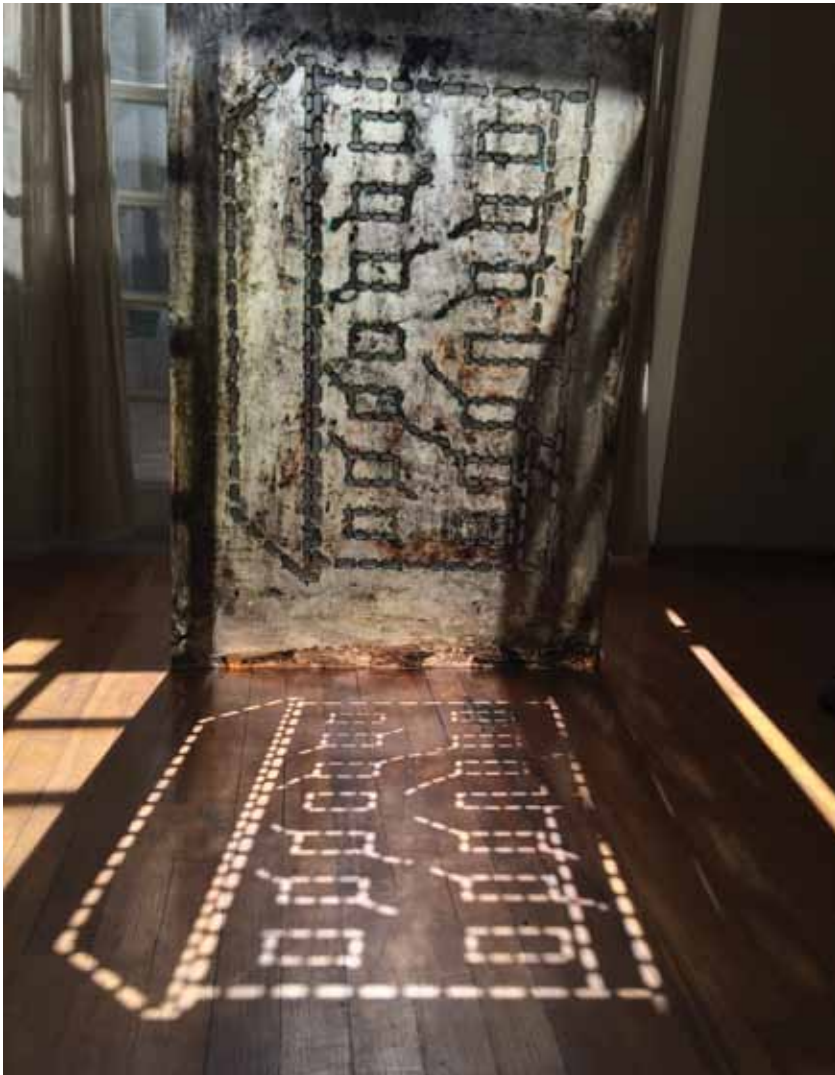
While representation in art is an action that happens in at least three stages (looking, conceptualizing, and expressing or capturing), in Miguel's case, this activity is central thanks

Where some see only a sign or a drain or a wire fence, Miguel sees an entire world: houses, dogs, airplanes, leaves, whales. And then, like a *mise-en-abîme*, his ability to attribute meaning to them sets up a game of infinite representations.



Miguel Castro Leñero's personal archives

▲ *Double House*, 30 x 40 cm, 2005 (ink, crayon, and graphite on paper). Private collection.



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▲ View of the plate for *House with Cracks II*, 75.5 x 104 cm, 2016 (single print) in the artist's studio.



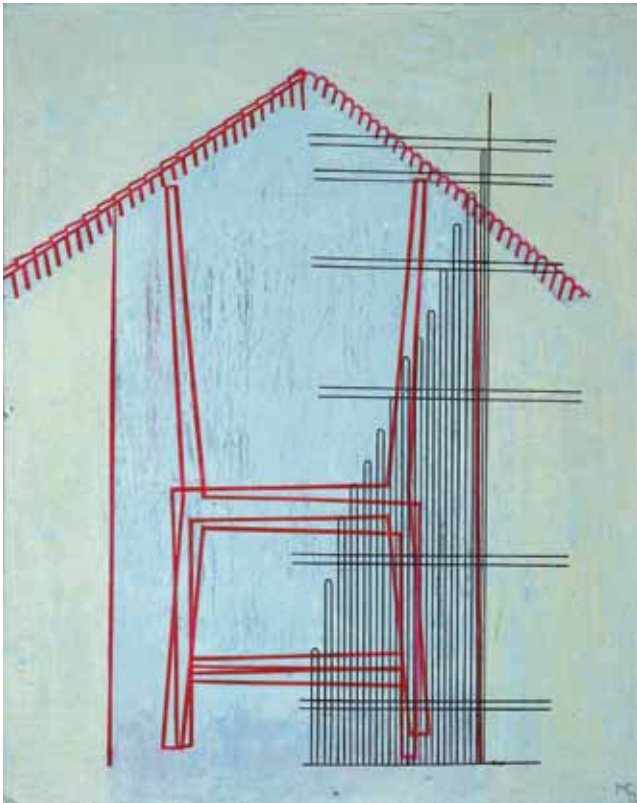
▲ Brancusi's *Eagle*, 73 x 24.5 x 13.3 cm (bronze).

to his ability to discover, both in the sense of the mere image and in the sense of its possibilities of symbolizing. Where some see only a sign or a drain or a wire fence, Miguel sees an entire world: houses, dogs, airplanes, leaves, whales. . . . And then, like a *mise-en-abîme*, his ability to attribute meaning to them sets up a game of infinite representations:

I work with images of houses that represent the interior climate; it's raining or there are clouds. This way, the inventiveness that can emerge from these themes is endless, and even more so in the meaning of the house. In this sense, I construct images that develop autonomously. For me, one criterion is to know the material People who make interesting things don't do it because they have very sophisticated materials, but because they understand the materials they're working with.¹

Thus, his representations, which display the approach he uses to capture his surroundings, show us the differing levels of readings and the various reference points that he shapes:

He visually investigates areas that range from optical curiosity and the act of filing away or collecting apparently random visual information to the gathering of his most conscious motifs (always simple,



Miguel Castro Leñero's personal archives

▲ *House with Chairs*, 200 x 160 cm, 2014 (oil on canvas).

not encased in meaning, but graphically forceful or visually intriguing in formal terms). Cages, dogs, shadows of cars, projected or informal forms, details or textual left-overs of the urban landscape, symbolic motifs from notebooks or normally attractive, but decontextualized, schema allow him to make combinations that are more open to pleasure and formal —rather than narrative— interpretation.

In terms of process, Miguel pours all this onto the canvas, involving himself in an extensive process of reconversion. He investigates, cross-checks, compares, destroys, and uses these motifs as catalysts to find his theme. From a more poetic perspective, his oeuvre, whether figurative or not, is representative of a reflexive, process-based concept.²

One fundamental characteristic of his work has already been hinted at here: his series. When I look at them, the airplanes, the houses, the dogs . . . , I am surprised by another essential specificity of his pieces: their playfulness and warmth. This form of constructing underlines the value of his working process. What is more important than the finished canvas or sculpture is the development and exploration of the “mother image,” to give it a name alluding to the original image that sparked the work. From there emerge its variations or possi-



Miguel Castro Leñero's personal archives

► *Rug Dog*, 41 x 44.5 x 14 cm, 2016 (bronze).

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bilities: textures, framings, and lines, in addition to the change in techniques and materials.

The artist has reflected on the importance of representation and the emergence of symbols in human development:

Part of my work involves seeing with Man's capacity for representation, which has also changed over time. That is, the creation of symbols develops new forms that are very linked to the evolution of technique; for example, with machines, with creating symbols, new signs that didn't exist before and that create a new one, which implies enriching our vision of the world. . . ; human beings, without intending to, without representing symbolically, have done this in many cases. To illustrate this, just think of the signs that people make spontaneously, where they draw a dog at the foot of a tree to remind their neighbors not to let their pets urinate there.³

Miguel Castro has expressed his admiration for designers, for design in general, and for how the beauty of an object sometimes resides in its function or in the synthesis it achieves, or in the aesthetic intelligence where it manifests itself. In that sense, he compares the construction of the image to poetry and, coincidentally, that is what he also achieves in his work. Finally, poetry is the construction of a new world on the basis of the day-to-day, a new world in which malleability and the beauty of language dominate. And that is what Miguel's work is like: out of what he sees and collects on his daily wanderings emerge images that he endows with symbolism and powerful beauty. Evoking the title of the novel by Bulgarian writer Iliya Troyanov, we could describe him as a collector of worlds. **MM**

NOTES

¹ Leonel Sagahón, interview with Miguel Castro Leñero, in Miguel Castro Leñero, *Avión casa* (Mexico City: Nostra Ediciones, at press).

² Juan Iván González de León, "Mirada y movimiento," in Miguel Castro Leñero, *Avión casa* (Mexico City: Nostra Ediciones, at press), p. 10.

³ Leonel Sagahón, op. cit.



▲ *Woman with Hat*, 98 x 71 cm, 2015 (ink and graphite on a workshop proof).

Miguel Castro Leñero's personal archives



▲ *Man with Hat*, 98 x 71 cm, 2015 (ink and graphite on workshop proof).

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