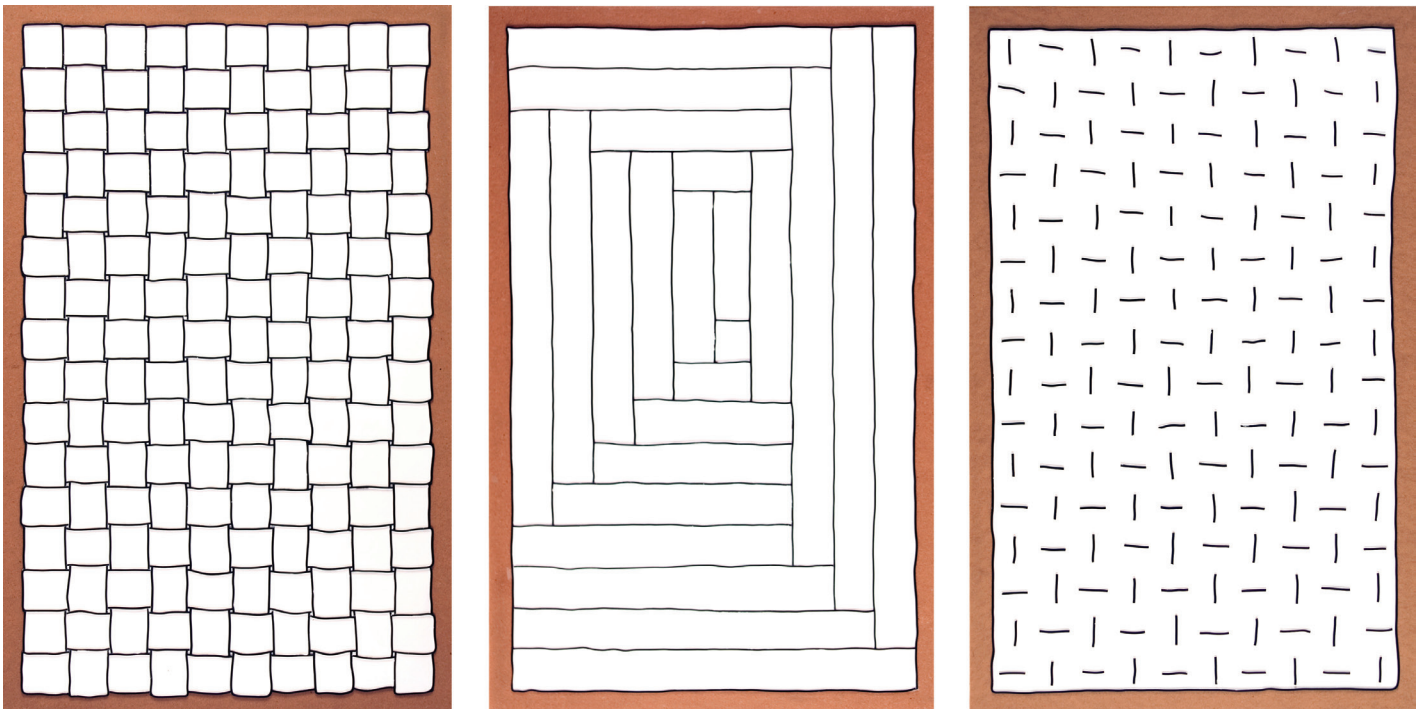


# Boris Viskin Beauty Will Come Later

Carmen Sánchez Cumming\*

“Isn’t this beautiful?”  
And Caspar would answer: “It is beautiful.”  
“So solemn, Caspar? So serious?”  
“It was only recently that I learnt to see its beauty,”  
said Caspar. “Beauty comes last of all.”

Jakob Wassermann (1873-1934)  
*Caspar Hauser: The Inertia of the Heart*<sup>1</sup>



*Woven Mats. Remixed*, 200 x 180 cm, 2009 (triptych, oil and pencil on canvas). Roberto López Fernández Collection.



*Cemetery of Drawings*, 100 x 122 cm, 2015 (oil and erasers on wood). Artist's collection.

When entering Mexico City's Modern Art Museum, in the first room to the left, laughter and occasional sighs of indignation displace the solemn murmuring that usually fills the rooms of museums. What's the occasion? Mexican artist Boris Viskin's recent exhibition, where his sense of humor, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes ironic, sometimes innocent, and sometimes not so very innocent, is expressed in the more than 90 pieces on display. This sense of humor is combined with topics like the history of art, politics, music, photography, cinema, faith, the body, and the artist's personal experiences.

The exhibition, curated by Iñaki Herranz, brought together paintings, sculptures, installations, and assembled combinations in relief alluding to philosophers like Plato and Heidegger; writers like Borges; painters like Matisse, Klimt, Toledo, and Picasso; scientists like Einstein; and historic events like the

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Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the fall of the Twin Towers. All of this leads to Boris Viskin's vast political, cultural, and artistic repertory.

Among the variety of techniques, materials, and themes, the name of the exhibition, "Beauty Will Come Later..." is the crosscutting thread among the pieces and serves to define Viskin's attitude toward art for the last 15 years of his artistic career: "We [Herranz and Viskin] decided to start with the year 2000, a crossroads in my career because I stopped working only, or primarily, oil on canvas and moved into other materials and languages. The exhibition brings together the works that deal more with the final result than with beauty as such. This is something that interests me: composition and the pictorial elements continue to guide my work, but they come in a little later or are not the central component."<sup>1</sup>

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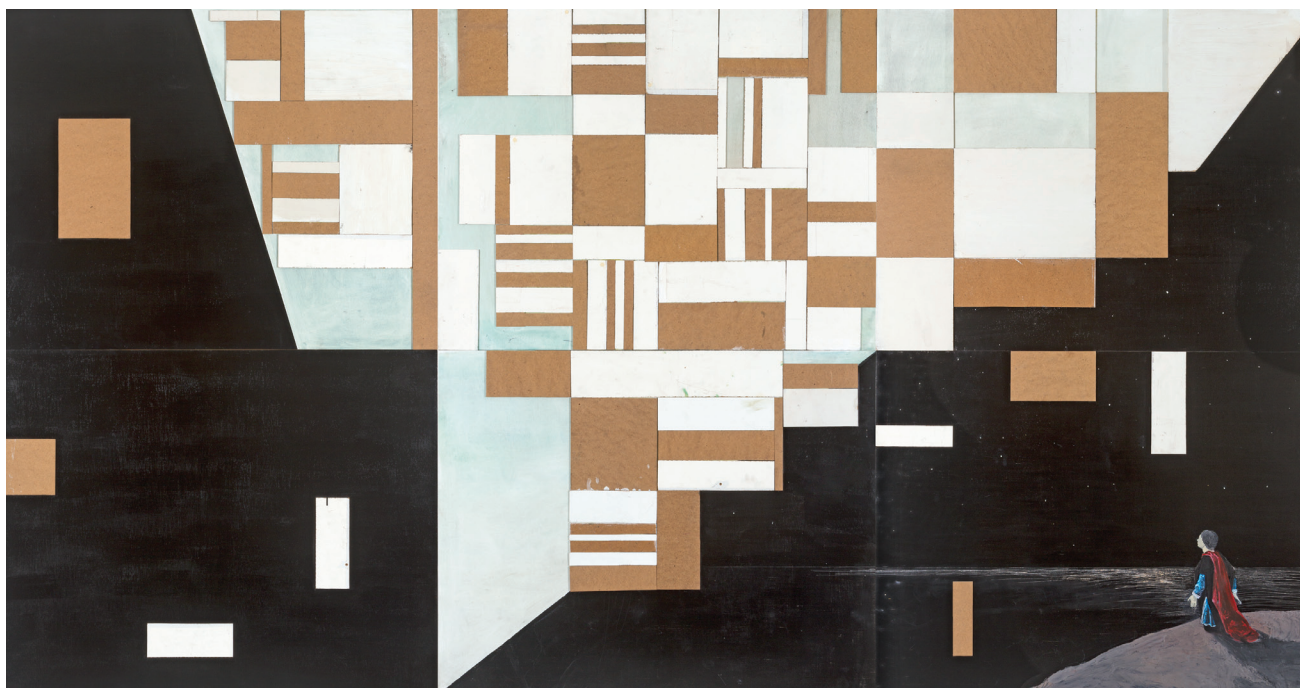
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All photos courtesy of the Modern Art Museum,  
National Institute of Fine Arts.





*Chair Looking at Its Parts (between Plato and Heidegger)*, square on the wall, 200 x 240 cm; chair, 80 x 40 x 50 cm, placed approximately 240 cm from the square; 2008. Artist's collection.





*The Appearance of Modern Art*, 190 x 366 cm, 2015 (oil on wood). Artist's collection.

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For this artist, the essential component is to be moved as he was moved on his first encounter with art, by a book of Renaissance painting. Beauty undoubtedly comes into view, but the painter/sculptor explains that the most important thing about his work, the reason he makes art, is a desire to surprise himself and surprise the viewer, in that order. Viskin achieves this through his sense of humor, a constant reflection about the creative act, and dialogue and contact with the materials—he admits that lately, he has been hammering and putting in screws more than painting.

He uses humor as something that motivates him, a language that allows him to create airily and naturally. “Humor has always been present in my work. Perhaps not in the first years when I had to radiate a certain seriousness, but starting in the 1990s, it’s been something that has interested me very much. From very innocent jokes that remind me of my childhood to more aggressive ones. I feel that jokes often bring into play realities and truths. You risk falling into mere quips or just leaving things on that level.... But if you go beyond that, I think it creates better communication with the viewer.”

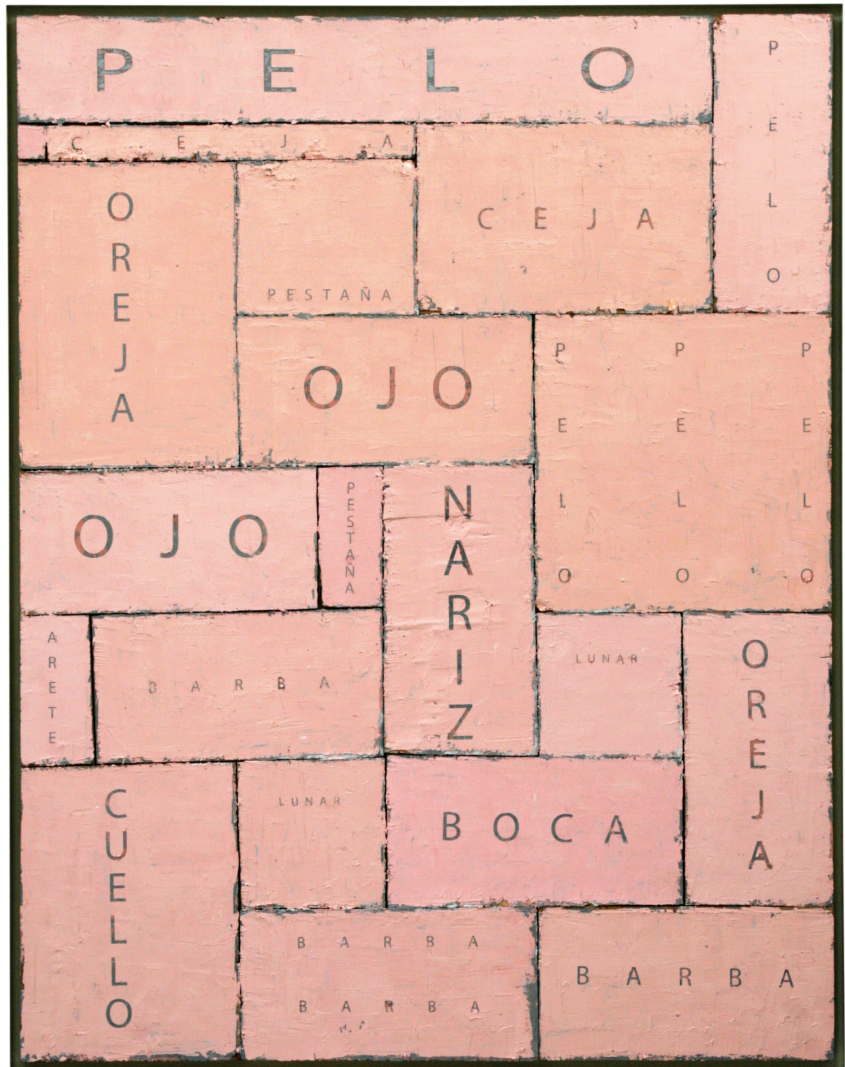
Almost all the pieces in the exhibition are accompanied by fact sheets with fragments of Viskin’s writing, texts that he has written while making the piece and that replace technical or conceptual explanations. In the installation *Crates* (2000), for example, the artist asks the wooden barrier, his postmodern Coatlicue, or mother of the gods, to protect us from Donald Trump, from the self-styled Islamic State, and the deputies of Mexico’s Green Party. In *Troy* (oil and collage on wood, 2011), a piece that includes the signatures of Matisse, Picasso, Torres García, and Girolletta, Viskin points to a feeling of being closed in and limitations due to what he had already created, that will never be new again and that in a certain way limits his







The viewer has the feeling of sharing an inside joke with the artist, to the point of feeling like an accomplice.



*Constructive Spoken Self-Portrait*, 190 x 150 cm, 2013 (oil on wood). Artist's collection.

It seems completely natural after talking to Viskin for a while that he includes his personal world in his pieces, that he resolves humor with the solemnity of religion and history, and that he has the flexibility of making art with so many materials, so many techniques, and so many themes. This artist is not very concerned with classifications, or rather, he is very concerned: "In the 1990s, people talked a lot about the division between painting and concept, and I would love those divisions to be done away with; I would love for us to be able to dialogue with what [artists] want to communicate, the aesthetics or the presence of the work, and that there not be so much emphasis on how it's made.... I don't care much if they catalogue me as a painter or not, or if it's a painting, or it's an object, or it's something assembled.... Iñaki [the show's curator] is the one who will deal more with these terms."

At the end of the day, the important thing is the message. **NM**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jakob Wassermann, *Caspar Hauser: The Inertia of the Heart* (London and New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> All quotes from Viskin are from an interview by the author in Mexico City, June 29, 2016.