

TERESA VELÁZQUEZ

Looking at the details. It seems like an ordinary phrase, but it summarizes the nature of painting and, at the same time, describes with penetrating clarity the work of Teresa Velázquez (Mexico City, 1962).

Looking at the Details

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▲ *Reflections on Claesz*, 80 cm diameter, 2009 (oil on wood).



In *Emergency*, the artist manages to transform the real into an abstract pictorial gesture, and abstract painting itself into a real, photographic event.

◀ *London Jubilee*, 130 x 100 cm, 2012 (oil on wood).

In 2009, she made a tondo, or circular composition, thinking of the gaze of another creator, who, like herself, understood the immense richness to be found in detail: Pieter Claesz, a painter who specialized in *ontbijt* or breakfasts. This was a sub-genre of the Dutch still lifes and a subject that made him famous for decades in the seventeenth century, in which austere meals (a herring, a piece of bread, a ham) were accompanied by a ubiquitous rummer goblet, known for its broad base studded with small textured crystal ovals or prunts. And it is exactly in his treatment of the goblet's glass sphere that Claesz's mastery can be seen. This small detail activated the argumentation Teresa Velázquez inscribes in her painting titled *Reflections on Claesz*: painting the transparent and the reflection of the light in the old *waldfglass* or "forest glass" that these goblets were made of from the Middle Ages until the seventeenth century.

In the concert of painting in Mexico, since the late 1980s, Teresa Velázquez's work has stood out clearly as an example of reflexive art, not only in relation to reflecting light, as mentioned above, but also with regard to the craft of painting as a way of thinking. Her paintings, above all the most recent, are an exercise —excuse the repetition— of

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visual reflection. This is the origin of her meticulousness, her courageous anachronism, and her willingness to take a risk, as opposed to the routine styles dominating the work of many artists of her generation. Without even wanting to, all this moves her away from a practice that had become either a mere exercise in slightly abstract formalist derivations or very speculative figurative painting about vacillating, aerial, hackneyed topics —that is, kitsch canvases.

The immense challenge of expressing a condition completely foreign to the opacity of painting, like the diaphanous effect of light moving through a glass by Claesz, and which Velázquez expands in her detailed view, can be intuited in a previous work titled *Emergency*, from 2008. It supposes a link among her previous paintings, more concentrated on a formal approach to color as a mechanism for maximizing darkness versus natural luminosity. In this work, the shattered crystal is the perfect vehicle to put to the test painting's possibilities as a function of a visual experience, where the subject and the light shining on it are transformed in a luminous phenomenon, like the reflection in Claesz's crystal goblet.

At the same time, *Emergency* becomes a plastic event *per se*. If we just glance at it, what we see is simply a brush sliding along the canvas as it is tied into knots, creating a network of pure painting. If we look at it in detail, we suddenly perceive the glass



▲ *Solar Hierophany*, 121 x 162 cm, 2012 (oil on wood).

shattered into a thousand pieces. This is like in *Reflections on Claesz*, in which our sharp gaze fixes on the upper edge of the tondo where the semicircular edge of the rummer goblet appears. In *Emergency*, the artist manages to transform the real into an abstract pictorial gesture, and abstract painting itself into a real, photographic event.

This reflexive dynamic (in the broad sense of the term) around a pictorial image is what makes Teresa Velázquez's work profoundly intelligent, much more rationalist than intuitive. A painting like *London Jubilee* (2012) is very eloquent in this sense.

It is important to underline that on this oval canvas (ingeniously anachronistic in a context dominated by right-angled paintings), what we see is merely an excuse. Velázquez insists on problematizing a concept like reflection as the definition of the painting itself: light as a mechanism of sensible visualization, from its mirrored reflection on the city's rain-soaked pavement. *London Jubilee* is also founded on extremely rigorous manufacture and from a clearly figurative form of painting, even though everything we see, the simple detail of an unimportant snapshot, is elevated to another category thanks to the painting itself, just as Pieter Claesz in the mid-seventeenth century would equally raise to the historic place of the sublime the meager remains of an everyday Dutch breakfast.



▲ *Flying Dusk*, 90 x 120 cm, 2012 (oil on wood).



◀ *Moon*, 48 cm diameter, 2008 (oil on wood).

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▶ *Dancing Lady Orchid*, 65 x 87 cm, 2013 (oil on wood).

Finally, in this cursory, hopscotched look at some of Teresa Velázquez's work, we should underline two paintings in which the artist took a considerable risk: *Solar Hierophany* and *Flying Dusk*, both painted in 2012. In both, she uses a genre like the landscape that has moved away from the strictly pictorial, losing the prominence it once had. Velázquez deals with it from a classical point of view, with the composition of romantic colors; again, another strange anachronism. For some reason, both canvases are perturbing and move away from the recurring topics that have vulgarized to the point of nausea both figurative landscapes and the meridian light that bathes both paintings.

What makes these paintings different, and, I insist, shimmering, to use a term related to light and, therefore, to painting, is that they are the result of looking at something in detail and turning that gaze into a phenomenon with plasticity, into a moment of pure painting and, at the same time, an opening and shutting of the eye, in a flash of evanescent light, or, to paraphrase the title Teresa Velázquez used for one of her expositions, in a past meridian moment. ■■■