

Al ras. (*out in the open*)

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When we talk about people living out of doors, do we mean it literally, in the simple sense of people who live outside, sleep out in the open, or do we rather mean people who have nowhere to sleep, no place to take shelter when it gets dark? When we were little we were told that gypsies – those poor figures of imaginary, and not so imaginary, evil – have always lived in the open air, in the open fields. But what made them all the more gypsies in our eyes, in the sense that scared us most but at the same time seduced us most, was imagining them, from the reassuring shelter of our safety, out there, outside in the night and in the open. In our daily attachment to order, what they really represented both frightened and fascinated us. In some ways they were our link to certain powers and dominions corresponding to the true nature of our being; they helped us remember the permanent presence of the real. They satisfied our thirst for adventure and reminded us, nonetheless, of the need to keep away from danger. A spiral with no possible way out. By day everything is seen clearly, while at night, as we sometimes observe, all cats are gray. They merge into their background, the earth, they cannot be easily distinguished from it and, what is probably worse, they share its very nature. As we noted above, reality scares us and fascinates us at the same time. And, contrary to the assertions of our common sense, reality is more fully reality at night; something which serves to explain, amongst other great mysteries, why the vast majority of academies, since their foundation, have held their drawing classes at night.

To live out in the open, whether by choice or otherwise, is to go beyond the limits of what is reasonable, to defy common sense. And this is all the more true of sleeping out in the open, leaving behind all that is reasonable, amidst the nocturnal and the treacherous. Children have always intuitively known this: they put up their tents to spend the night in the garden and then, in the middle of the night, abandon them, shamefacedly returning to the reassuring warmth of their beds inside. Those who seek out the lost margins know it, and even those who have set out to explore the unknown regions of the map are searching for it.

Being out in the open – al ras – is a condition of both people and things. It is a circumstance or set of circumstances which underlies the state of someone or something. It is being in the open air without cover, exposed, with neither roof nor shelter, and it is also a flat surface, smooth and plane, with no appreciable protuberances. It is also, to conclude, a quality which forms an integral part of the very being of people, or some people; of things, or some things. A certain darkness is essential to it, just as the unforeseeable is to people's lives.

Pitch your tent in the garden and seek the reassuring shelter of your bed. As José Jiménez observes, "a gentle fin de siècle chromatism irresistibly impels us to take refuge in names, when our lives are more at the mercy of untimeliness than ever". We are living in the open, in a state of radical desolation, homeless and dispossessed, "covered by not one shared an idea and, in the widest sense, not one idea", as Georg Simmel declared many years ago.

Out in the open and on a stage swept by recurrent crises; one which, we might now add, is hardly characterized by stability. The world has become intensely complex and, in our state of permanent stupor, we have grown accustomed to living on the wire of the purely immediate.

"We move – art invariably moves – between the shadows." As Pere Fabra says a few pages further on, "we are now carrying a little less in the way of baggage. From the point at which the artists of this century first entered into the repeated and bitter experience of dissipating those illusions, they have been able to rid themselves of the weight and burden

of their own condition: the artist has transformed him / her-self into a ghostly figure. A kind of shadow, what is interesting about him/her (and to him/her) is not so much the language as the gesture."

In this state of things, the exhibition Al ras sets out to show, through the work of eleven specially selected artists, the emergence of new ways of making art – within the plurality of different outlines presented by the present panorama – intensely associated with this new consciousness of dispossession.

These works are born into the untimeliness of any system of principles, traditions or linguistic codes. "Denial", untimely weaning, is their condition and, at the same time, that which relates them most effectively to the cultural situation of the nineties. They are the reflection of a mistrust, or rather an indifference, with respect to both the possibility of availing themselves of the signs of the art which preceded them and the creative possibilities of J.-F. Lyotard's so-called "immaterials."

They express a new vitality in their direct confrontation of the aesthetic challenges surrounding them. They are, by virtue of their precariousness, the poverty of the materials, the fragility of their forms, the deliberate carelessness of their structures, their gravity and their sense of humor, a show of generosity, and even an affirmation of abundance; gifts possessed only by those who are free from need.

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In a party, you're either there or you're not there. Lorenzo Valverde, like all the other *descamisados*, the "shirtless" underprivileged, has this experience engraved on his memory and, set down before the possibility of being, the results of success, the dispensable part of his work – that is to say, the last to determine the content because, whatever happens, he was determined to get it right – has affirmed that primordial moment. In his painting, he has once again thrown himself into that generous game of artistic activity, in which one never knows how much will be demanded, nor where it will end, but one knows, nevertheless, that one can live life to the full. Lorenzo Valverde feels a radical sympathy for all those humiliated and rejected characters who are ourselves. Painting is one of the ways of thinking it, of letting it out, of explaining it, and, thus, of producing the consciousness of what we are – the countless obligations imposed on us, the final purpose of which is not, however, clear to us, the satisfaction we attain through fulfilling them – in order to lighten our burden and bring us a little closer to the possibility of defiance.

What the works included in Al ras have in common is their presentation of event, of chance and, for that very reason, of ephemerality. They are, in the main, works which define themselves in a far from a stable state, works which are produced in a new way on each new occasion. They are like moments which exhaust themselves in themselves, art that takes place between two or more subjects on the fringes of all normative intention. They probably represent art in its strict sense: the affirmation of the commitment made by each one of these young artists to chance itself, the luxurious surrender to a game played with life and death.