

Thesis

“THE POETIC DIALOGUE WITHIN THE ART, AND THE EPHEMERAL”

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A brief introduction

I have always identified myself as a painter, that is where I find my roots. I started painting and experimenting with colors over different supports at a very young age, starting with watercolors I immediately switched to acrylics where I discovered a whole new palette, techniques and a vast world of textures, this was my main motivation to pursue my further career as an artist, or as a painter as I thought. Through these past years along with my training degree in studio arts, I have had the chance of learning and experimenting many more techniques such as oil painting, which will become my main medium regarding the painting practice until nowadays.

Aside from the world of fine arts, I have always had a particular interest for other subjects such as music and letters, both quite creative and artistic subjects too. Before entering full time into the world of fine arts, I spent, what happens to be quite a few years, in a music academy, deeply motivated and involved into the music world. During these early years, I learnt a lot about all kinds of music genres, history and practice, which further on I would always try to bring and blend with the art world, and my personal art production, as we will clearly find in my early days as a settled artist.

Regarding the letters and a more literary side, I could say that I have always had a deep sensitivity and curiosity for words and the use of them. I can not say I am a big reader, but I have always found a strong motivation for writing either short stories or poetry until my last days of highschool. It wasn't until a couple of years of my settling as an artist that my motivation and need for the use of words and writing emerged again, this is where I started introducing the use of texts, either written or recorded, into my art pieces and general production.

The jazz period

Starting from the beginning, in the painting era, I would usually listen to music when working, getting inspired by it or even including it in some sort of way, either through forms or colors, on the paintings, this is where "jazz" took an important place.

Jazz is a music genre that originated in the African-American communities of New Orleans, Louisiana, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with its roots in blues, characterized by swing and blue notes, complex chords, vocal calls and responses, polyrhythms and improvisation. Although jazz is difficult to define because it encompasses a wide range of music spanning a period of over 100 years, it is also defined as a "form of art music" that took place in the United States through the confrontation of the African-American with European music. It is music that includes qualities such as swing, improvising, group interaction, developing an individual voice, and being open to different musical possibilities, that's where we can relate it to my work.

Experimenting through my painting practice, I first started by slowly working on larger scales which would allow me to do broad tests and exercises of movements projected straight to the canvas, within the casted shapes and visual forms, always coming from the feelings my body would project when listening to music, in this case specifically jazz music. I would also use a very varied palette, listening to the emotions I would perceive through the tunes playing in the background, playing with colors and shapes, creating my very own symphony, inspired from the experimentation and variabilities of jazz performances and records.

Although I would slowly be getting unsatisfied by the results of this abstraction of the painting, and in this exact moment is when I started documenting the whole process. Day by day I would go to the studio to work on the same piece, over and over, everyday from a new different perspective. After a few days I would have created a small diary of the painting process, and that

would be my very first words regarding my own art work and art practice. I would write from feelings I would get through the action of painting, such as joy, freedom, energy, to the feelings afterwards, at the end of a long day of work and my thoughts regarding the final results of the day, such as satisfaction, frustration or even pride. Aside from these whole documentation of feelings, thoughts and emotions, I would also write down the songs or tracks I would have been listening at the moment of the practice, realizing most of them were jazz pieces, just as unpredictable as my emotions or drawings of the day, finding an important connection between this specific genre of music and my personal production.

At this point I could say I had made a whole work with a specific soundtrack, and documented every single bit of it, both on paper and on record, creating a parallel story of the final painting. It was in this exact moment when I thought it could be a good idea to present the final piece alongside with its story, so I decided to record all the documentation I had been collecting through days, and transform it into an art form that could blend with the final painting, creating a final piece of "a painting with soundtrack", and that would be the very start of the introduction of words and text to my art practice.

The Beat Generation period

After my inspirational jazz period as a full time painter, I slowly started feeling interested and drowned, more and more, by words. Preceded by some creative writing attempts I soon started doing some research until discovering the Beat Generation which, later on, would have a big influence on my work.

The Beat Generation was a literary movement formed by a group of authors and friends, mostly, from Columbia University, which emerged around the mid forties, early fifties in America, usually regarded as anti-academic. The principal elements of this post-war movement, the Beat culture, were the rejection of standard narrative values, the exploration of American and Eastern religions, the rejection of economic materialism, explicit portrayals of the human condition and the experimentation, liberation and exploration of sexuality and psychedelic drugs.

The members of the Beat Generation developed a reputation as new bohemian hedonists, who celebrated non-conformity and spontaneous creativity becoming later on, the main figures associated with the San Francisco Renaissance.

Many of their ideas were initially formed in response to professors, discussing the need for a new vision to counteract what they perceived as their teacher's conservative, formalistic literary ideals. Using themes and topics such as the liberation of the world from censorship, the spread of ecological consciousness and the notion of a "fresh planet", the opposition to the military-industrial machine civilization, respect for other "religiousness" based on the development of an advanced civilization.

Within this big and new anti-conformist movement, we can highlight a couple of main figures that would have an remarkable and very important role throughout the Beat era and further movements.

The first one would be Jack Kerouak, an American novelist, pioneer of the Beat Generation, mostly known for his spontaneous prose, a very raw way of writing, where we can identify the absence of filters or the non-censorship when writing at the moment, the very present without further corrections, adjustments to the texts or any edits, in this case both novels and poems. He would mainly write autobiographical novels about his experiences throughout life and the people

he was surrounded with, dealing with topics such as catholic spirituality, buddhism, jazz, poverty, promiscuity and drugs.

And the second one is Allen Ginsberg, an American poet and writer, vigorously opposed to militarism in general, specially to the economical materialism, and sexual repression. He embodied various aspects of this counterculture with his views on drugs, sex, multiculturalism, hostility to bureaucracy, and openness to Eastern religions. Best known for his poem "Howl", Ginsberg denounced what he saw as the destructive forces of capitalism and conformity in the United States, the poem reflected Ginsberg's own sexuality and his relationships with a number of men. For decades, Ginsberg was active in political protests across a range of issues from the Vietnam War to the Bangladeshi genocide. Leading a modest lifestyle, Ginsberg was a buddhist who extensively studied Eastern religious disciplines.

A few years later, many of the Beat writers and artists moved towards Greenwich Village, where they would actively organize gatherings, in parks, to discuss these many new literary ideas and new and fresh social, cultural and political vision of the world, at the same time, crossing paths with outstanding expressionism artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline, also contributors of the Beat Generation, leading into an emerging bohemian and hippie culture from the early sixties.

Although I did not really pursue the topics portrayed in the Beat Generation movement, I did feel quite intrigued and inspired by the amount of texts, novels and poetry they would produce, the way they were implementing it to their daily lives and the important use of it. I would start transpassing to words on paper anything I was feeling, I would start writing ideas, concepts and feelings that would eventually transform into prose or poetry, my love and passion for art, all the curiosities I was feeling drawn to and the new things I would keep on learning that would further on get good use on my productions. In this sense I can say that I ended up using the same method as them, a very raw and spontaneous prose of Kerouac, and the ability to transform thoughts and ideas into poetry, in order to vocalize and share them with the rest.

One of the projects that best captured these concepts was "Blue Form a Cyanotype", or as I like to call it "the blue concept". For this project, I took something that attracted me a lot, either aesthetically or by curiosity, in this case a cyanotype, and I wrote a poetic text for it. I would encompass topics from my personal perception of the object, to the concept itself or my feelings towards them. I described it from different perspectives, I saw the object and I became the object, as we can see in these extracts;

[...] I've seen blue for the first time in the ocean, blue in the sky, blue in my mom's eyes. I've seen blue through the wind. Not a regular blue, it has texture, shapes and tonalities, it breathes. [...]

[...] I can't talk, I can't say a word, I live without structure nor language, I'm not loud and yet I produce the softest sound you will ever hear. Sweet melody from the indefinable, warm notes from the unknown. [...]

That would be the transitional project that would lead me from paintings and music to concepts and an ephemeral minimalism, with an installation that would barely show the text to the audience, but it would let them hear bits from a recording of it, alongside of a blue soundtrack I made based on Scriabin's palette.

Alexander Scriabin was a musician that suffered from synesthesia, which is the ability or disorder of perceiving some senses through others senses, in his case, he was able to listen to colors, or see colors through music, so he made a palette based on piano scales.

Regarding my project, I did take all the blue shades of Scriabin's palette and made a symphony out of it, that would sound at the same time as the text was played, therefor making a parallelism with the physical art part of the installation, hiding some bits of the content of the text from the audience although giving them the pure sound of the blue.

The Fluxus period

Later on, throughout my art journey, I would keep on doing some research and learning until finding what would be my next most inspirational movement, the Fluxus movement, a subsequent or post-movement to the Beat Generation and the early sixties.

Fluxus was an international, interdisciplinary community of artists, composers, designers and poets during the sixties and seventies who engaged in experimental art performances which emphasized the artistic process over the finished product. It's known for an experimental interaction with different media and disciplines towards new art forms including conceptual art and video art. It's nowadays considered the most radical and experimental movement of the sixties, based on an anti-art and anti-commercial position, where the process and notions of the artwork would take over the end result themselves, emphasizing and understanding the interaction between the artist and the audience, such as the concept of the final piece, rather than the end object.

The fluxus collective had at the time what would be considered radical ideas about the concept of art, and the role of art within society. The different communities in the fluxus movement also had very different ideas about what fluxus was, even though the founder of the movement, George Maciunas, wrote a manifesto about it, was not very well received, instead a series of festivals gave place to a large community of people with similar believes creating a reputation about the movement, which would be based on a form of experimentation, leading to an important place broadening the limits of what is considered art.

The origins of Fluxus lie in many of the concepts explored by composer John Cage in his experimental music, exploring the notions of chance and indeterminacy in art, using music scores as a basis for compositions that could be performed in potentially infinite ways. A major influence is found in the work of Marcel Duchamp, an artist associated with Cubism, Dada and conceptual art. The term anti-art was a precursor to Dada, honoring found objects, ordinary objects purchased and declared as art, the alteration of these objects would challenge the view and perception of the notion of art.

Later in the sixties, the fluxus had had a big impact within the Asian community of artists, specially on members of the avant garde, where they would explore themes such as the limits and boundaries and feminism. Fluxus women artists were founding members and contributed works in varying media and with differing content. Some made experimental and performative work having to do with the female body that created a powerful female presence, which already existed and was very present within the Fluxus community since the very beginning. They were often simultaneously critiquing their position within a male dominated society while also exposing the inequalities within an art collective that claimed to be open and diverse.

Within the performative practice we find a subcategory, the event score. An event score is essentially a performance art script that is usually only a few lines long and consists of descriptions of actions to be performed rather than dialogue, differentiated from "happenings".

Whereas happenings were sometimes complicated, lengthy performances meant to blur the lines between performer and audience, performance and reality, event performances were usually brief and simple. Adversely, the event performances goal was to elevate the banal, to be mindful of the mundane and to frustrate the culture and academic market driven of music and art. The idea of the event began with the philosophical concepts and points of view within the art forms of music later applied to short descriptions of performable work. The term score was used in exactly the sense of use to describe a music score, a series of notes that allow anyone to perform the work, reinforcing the simple idea of “do it yourself”, bringing to art the idea that each person can create the work by simply doing it, reenforcing the idea, more radically, to conclude that anyone can create work of any kind from a score.

One of the most representative artists of the fluxus community, and one of my main influences for my latest work, is Yoko Ono.

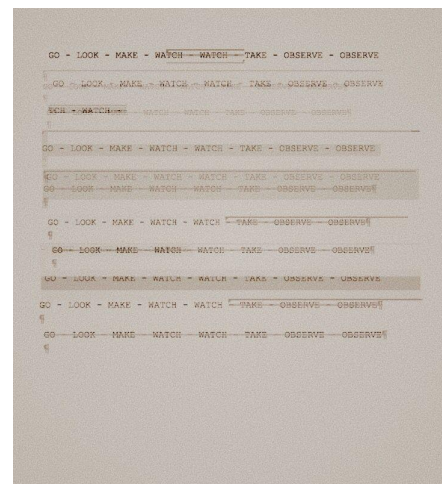
Yoko Ono is a Japanese multimedia artist, singer, songwriter, and peace activist, her work also encompasses performance art and filmmaking. Ono grew up in Tokyo and moved to New York City in 1952 to join her family. She became involved with New York City's downtown artists scene in the early 1960s, which included the fluxus group, and became well known in the late sixties.

Some of Yoko Ono's earliest conceptual artwork was the “Painting to Be Stepped On”, a scrap of canvas on the floor that became a completed artwork upon the accrual of footprints. With that work, she suggested that a work of art no longer needed to be mounted on a wall and inaccessible. Another two, and the most significant work of Ono's regarding my personal practice are “Cut Piece” and “Grapefruit Book”.

Being a pioneer of conceptual art and performance art, Ono created the performance piece “Cut Piece”, performed in 1964. The piece consisted of Ono, dressed in her best suit, kneeling on a stage with a pair of scissors in front of her, inviting and then instructing audience members to join her on stage and cut pieces of her clothing off. Silently confronting issues of gender, class and cultural identity until the piece concluded.

Around the same year, Ono produced the “Grapefruit Book”, a small book of conceptual art, the book is read as a set of instructions and scores through which the work of art is completed either literally or in the imagination of the viewer participant, the audience. This piece is considered one of the monuments of conceptual art of the early sixties, also taking a poetic and lyrical side that sets it apart from the work of other conceptual artists. Ono would enact many of the book's scenarios as performance pieces throughout her career, which formed the basis for her art exhibitions, including the highly publicized retrospective exhibition.

This was the beginning of my intrigue and start of the experimentation towards a more conceptual art field. Completely inspired by Yoko Ono's “Grapefruit Book” I made an art piece called “Action - An Art Project”. For this piece I would have been inspired by a specific score from the book mentioned earlier, where I was supposed to perform the actions mentioned, instead I took all the actions of the score and wrote a list with all of them, I recorded myself mentioning them, one after the other, and I created a track with my voice. The track consisted in a loop of the list of actions, slowly speeding up and overlapping one another until creating a symphony of incomprehensible sounds. As for the final piece, it consisted in a performance, using the largest space in the building as “the main canvas” the white cube, all cleared out except for a simple chair on one side of the room. The audio was played on the other side of the



room, and my role within the piece was to sit on the chair, in front of the audio piece, without doing anything else than sitting, the aim goal of the piece was to disturb the audience by creating a conflict with the few elements of the space, facing the action, in this case the audio, without any action, myself sitting, giving more importance to the thought and process behind, to the concept itself.

Another piece that was mainly inspired by fluxus was “A Poetic Dialogue”, which consisted in an installation with sound and found objects. For this piece, I built up some mirrors with recycled materials and set them up, once again, one in front of another. The concept in this installation came from a series of correspondence I have had with an old lover, after an intense conversation I sent them a poem in form of my most pure and sincere expression, and in response they replied



with another poem, what brought me to consider the idea of the paradox between the aggressiveness of conflicts and the delicacy of poetry. So for this installation, I recorded both poems in two different tracks, right and left, both in the same tone and overlapping one another. The final installation was a setting up of the two hanging mirrors, facing each other, and on top of them one speaker for each, with the different tracks sounding at the same time, creating this closed conflict that would stay between them, since, even though the audience would be able to walk all around, the mirrors would always face one another, and the poems would be hardly comprehensible because they would be recited at the same time, allowing the audience to understand loose words.

Afterwards, the built up mirrors were destroyed, and the found objects given back to their place, preserving only the essence of the main piece, the text, the dialogue, the conflict, the concept. At this point, aside of the conceptuality of the pieces, I would start experimenting with a more raw and extreme way to enhance the importance of it over the end result, by “destroying” every final art piece, preserving only the concept of it, mostly texts and poetry, turning every performance or installation into a unique ephemeral experience.

Finally, after a few years of research and experimentation, I have finally found my voice as an artist, a narrative that in some way or another, has been repeating and taking place over and over again within my art practice. It has been mostly reflected on concepts and ideas, best portrayed as poetry.

One of my latest projects was “Ode To Painting”, a minimalistic performance that took place, again on this white cube, bringing back the feeling and effect of a clean, light canvas to contrast with the main elements in it. The performance was based on a poem I wrote about my love, sensibility and devotion I once, and still, held as a painter, and for painting. Accompanied by a big frame I built in the form of a canvas, with a very thin, light, white translucent fabric, tall as me, to bring both pieces to the same level, an equality and balance between elements on the ground. The setting up of the canvas in the middle of the dark room, was accompanied with a spotlight that would let the performer, myself, play and interact with the element through the appearance of casted shadows. The performance was a very minimalistic and intimate reading of the love poem “Ode To Painting” to the canvas as the main representative of “the painting”.

“ Ode To Painting

*Which one of us two, lovers
Will fall first
And then throw themself
In an endless speech
Drowning in a few excuses
Which of us two, in love
Prepare in secret
The great crime
Who will have the courage
To admit that all this
Was just a great delusion
I chase a pair of arms
To take refuge in
Only time for a kiss
In my tunes
I kill you in prose
Like a last dose
I want to go with you
I want to die in your arms
My heart dropped
My joys, my angers
Forgetting my name
Like it's the first time
That you fell into my arms*

For you. “

To conclude, I would like to mention one more, and my last piece “The Book Installation”. The Book Installation is an art piece based on my art journey until the day, a compilation of all the poetry, notes, ideas and thoughts, best capturing all the concepts behind my art works and productions through the last couple of years. The way this project has been possible to make, is because throughout the years I have been capturing all the ephemeral installations and key moments for my work, on film. The Book Installation brought back the big translucent canvas I built for my last project, used as a canvas or the main screen, I projected on it an audiovisual piece I made. The video was a compilation of film photography, the physical remains of the previous projects and my growth as an artist, successively ordered to appear accompanied by an audio track. The track was formed by a bunch of notes, thoughts and extracts of my poetry, aligned and correlated with the images at the time of appearance, as a base of complemented narratives, both visual and auditory. The setting took place in a chapel, taking advantage of the



darkness of the space and the great acoustics due to the high vaulted ceiling, the big frame was setted on a corner of the room, creating a three dimensional effect that would look like a house with the casted shadows of the projection on it. As for the audiovisual piece, it was projected straight to the canvas, although the audio was coming from a speaker setted up behind the canvas, giving to the object its own voice, creating a bigger sense of the use of the pace, more sensorial, engaging experience for the audience.

The goal of this project was a form of closure, both from a personal perspective as the main artist and creator of the projects, and as a point of view leading to a new chapter, the closure of my narrative hunting, which one has finally been found and fulfilled.

The experimentation and knowledge throughout this process has lead me to a better understanding of my voice as an artist, and finding myself within the art community, engaging with the conceptual and even minimalistic form of art, getting loose of the vanity of the objects, preserving and enhancing the meanings behind each work, moving and making the audience react, leaving my mark without settling, fighting the the inevitable ephemerality of the loss with a remaining poetic dialogue.

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