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Título: Roberto Silva Ortiz: la vigencia de la tradición

Title: Roberto Silva Ortiz: A Valid Tradition

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Resumen: Roberto Silva regresa a Puerto Rico con la exhibición *Reducto*, cuya inauguración tuvo lugar el pasado 2 de junio en la Galería Artífice del Viejo San Juan. Nos reunimos con el artista para abordar la trascendencia de la memoria como impulso creador y el papel del artista como agente reivindicativo de la tradición pictórica. Publicado originalmente en español en junio de 2016.

Abstract: Roberto Silva returns to Puerto Rico with *Reducto*, an exhibition that opened on June 2nd at the Artífice Gallery in Old San Juan. We met the artist to discuss the importance of memory as a creative impulse, and the role of the artist as an agent reclaiming the pictorial tradition. Originally published in Spanish in June 2016.

Palabras clave: Pintura, Roberto Silva, Reducto, Galería Artífice, Memoria, Laura Tíscar García

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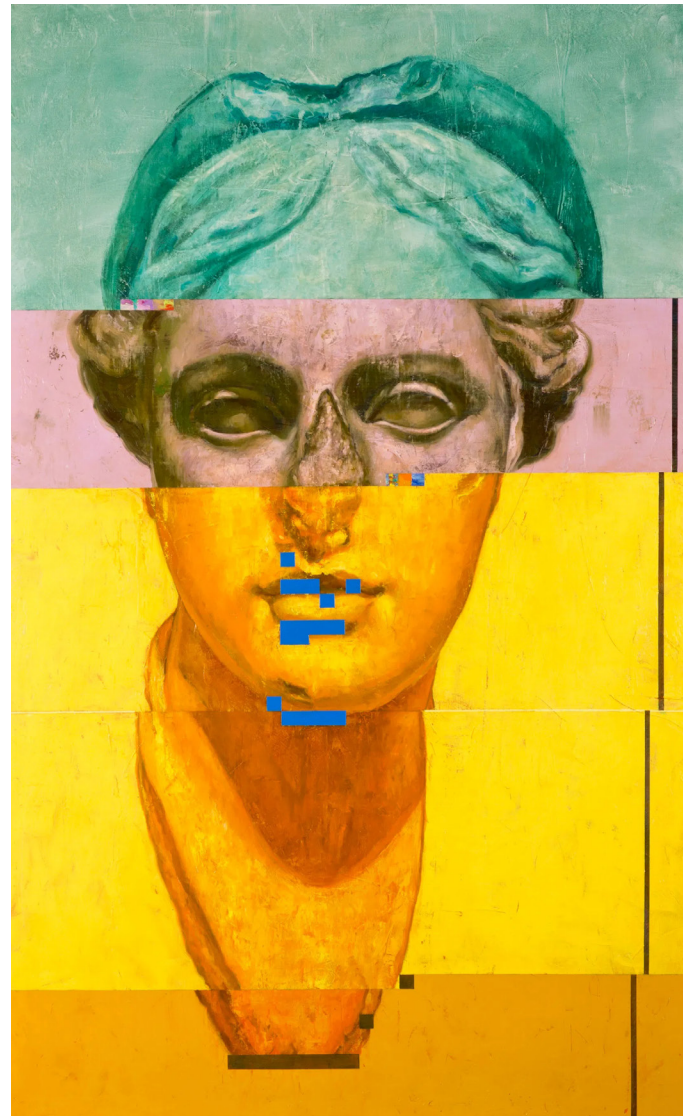
Roberto Silva, Exhibition: *Reducto*, 2016.

Roberto Silva crowned his return to Puerto Rico with *Redoubt*, an ode to the relevance of artistic tradition, at an opening at Galería Artífice in Old San Juan on June 2, 2016. We met with the artist to address, among other existential matters, the transcendence of memory—redoubt—as a creative impulse, and the artist’s role in revalidating the pictorial tradition.

Laura Tíscar: *Redoubt* solidified your return to Puerto Rico after many years of self-exploration and experience. At barely 20 years of age, with a scholarship from the *Cátedra Latinoamericana de Artes Plásticas y Música*, you went to the Academia de Bellas Artes San Alejandro (in Havana), where you completed your bachelor’s degree and began a journey with numerous layovers along the way. Apart from its militaristic connotation, in what sense does the notion of *redoubt* keep us connected to the experiences that stay with us even when their physical presence fades away?

Roberto Silva: That’s a very good question ... When I was creating the series, I meditated on the way in which information gathered by our senses is later stored and transformed, something that happens collectively and individually. This innate process leads us to create digital extensions that allow us to store, recall, and recreate. Using Greco-Roman culture as a starting

point gave me the possibility to talk about beginnings, displacements, collapses, beauty, and knowledge. I appropriated a marble bust which, essentially, is not Roman, but a copy of a Greek one, since the Romans created a newer version of the same piece. After thousands of years, I am now bringing new life to it through the manipulation of a three-dimensional model in digital format. We are in an era where we can approach memory in various ways and transfer it. The appropriation of classical sculptures showing signs of deterioration is an immediate metaphor for the development and transformation of civilizations. For the most part, this series touches on the fall of ideas and social orders that are absorbed into the everlasting flow of time. It is a way of creating from the remains inherited from past civilizations. The digital information that we leave behind is stored and then travels into the future more subtly, almost like thought itself and the stone bastions which were once used for defense and protection, and which are now turning into virtual borders in a digital world. Moreover, we are keepers of our own human experiences not only individually, but collectively. Drawing from the traditions of painting and sculpture allows me to create from a type of redoubt of the human spirit.



Roberto Silva, Exhibition: *Reducto*, 2016.

L.T.: In military terms, “redoubt” refers to a fortress, a protective or defensive structure. In other words, redoubt symbolizes a stance, even an act of faith. This faith is particularly important in the work of a contemporary painter who has never denied his classical background. Should contemporary artists be tied to the traditions that inspired them, or should tradition find its place within contemporary fine arts?

R.S.: Images precede words; without them language would not exist. Images taught us how to speak and write. Is a letter not an image? Both elements have evolved over the millennia, but in contemporary times we have reached a point where words aspire to take the place of images. We have been evolving for millions of years, learning through mimesis and responding with those abilities we have genetically inherited; our existence is a serious matter. I think traditions help us find our place, they help us decide what to develop and what to destroy. Being conscious of this,

I consider myself among those intellectuals who have a holistic view of reality. I'm a freethinker; I don't feel bound to tradition, but I do honor it and express it when necessary.

L.T.: The opening of *Redoubt* is accompanied by a stunning video produced by Filmes Zapatero, the same producers who have worked with artists such as Calle 13, as well as *REDOUBT: Tradition and Disruption in the Work of Roberto Silva*, a text written by your friend and mentor Rafael Trelles. In it, Trelles highlights the redemptive nature of your interventions with classical icons and states that you understand “that the knowledge of Greek art we inherited through the Renaissance is not obsolete, even if it is discredited today under the stigma of academic art.” Do you feel that artists who reaffirm the contemporary nature of tradition are more likely to be subjected to criticism? And, critics aside, do you think their work has received the recognition and dissemination which they are due from art institutions and the market?



R.S.: It is natural for a sector to become polarized when faced with something it does not master or understand. There is nothing more offensive than art itself, and because of this, a logic develops to criticize something that is loaded with history. What I can say with respect to recognition and dissemination is that subjectivity has turned into a monster trained by the market and by criticism. Rhetoric is made for convincing.

Roberto Silva, Exhibition: *Reducto*, 2016.

L.T.: When speaking of your creation, you allude to two influences, “work that shows your interest in the classical techniques of representation, as well as a heavy influence from magical realism.” Because of the nature of the images, *Redoubt* leads us directly to these classical reminiscences, and we run the risk of overlooking the ever-present influence of magical realism in the piece. Is there any relation between this influence and the nostalgia for a better world, one that is as ideal as possible, as present yet hidden as tradition is in contemporary art?

R.S.: There are influences from both, but I am not tied to any single aesthetic. I work in series and it is the image that guides me. As a resource, I use representational art because it is very

flexible in its dialogue with ideas. As for what you mentioned about reaching a specific ideal, yes it is something close to certain ideas I have regarding painting and society. For example, Pablo Casals is a symbol of dignity. The cello is the instrument that symbolizes human dignity, something that is represented the moment it is no longer played publicly in repudiation of the war and the Franco regime. For me, working on my paintings on daily basis and promoting some universal discourse make me feel alive. As well as speaking for those who, because of the system, have not yet found their own voice or potential. Those of us who have found ourselves must inspire others and declare that another world is possible.

L.T.: You once told me something that I've never been able to forget. "Over the years, I've said goodbye to so many people that I am now incapable of remembering the meaning (of farewell)." Is melancholy an essential aspect in art as a practice, the motor that drives us to capture moments, to create and recreate ourselves in ephemeral and eternal images?



Roberto Silva, Exhibition: *Reducto*, 2016.

R.S.: Melancholy is something that not everyone can handle... It is associated with something pathological, with the purest of sorrows, a hindrance to living fully. At certain times, I am quite melancholic, maybe because I'm not afraid of looking inward. And to be in constant touch with those emotions can put the body and psyche at risk. Using the Kintsugi technique in sculptures is a way of processing sadness. There are parts of us that are lost during goodbyes, and there is no way to hide it, because it actually happened. Therefore, what remains are the scars that reshape us as individuals. Sorrow has taught me to explore the beauty in the cracks that pain leaves behind. The Japanese artisan who works with Kintsugi decorates the cracks of a piece of broken ceramic with silver and gold. If I were not really willing to feel, none of this would have happened. The emotional component of a work of art is inherent in the object itself.

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