

The Desert Grows

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February 2010

Francisco Ugarte has undertaken to intervene in an iconic and quintessentially Mexican site: the house designed by Luis Barragán for himself in the Tacubaya neighborhood of Mexico City. The house is preserved exactly as when the architect lived there, laden with all his obsessions, customs, objects, and particular ways of inhabiting a space. Furniture, books, notes, religious images, ceramic ware from Tonalá, gilt paintings by Goeritz, spheres, photographs of black Amazons, the signs and symbols of a life lived.

The intervention proposed by Francisco Ugarte is radical. At one stroke, the entire emotional and physical charge of the house's contents is defused. It becomes another place. At the same time, it forms the depths that lie beneath immediate appearances. An interplay of concealments, reflections and revelations is created. Every piece of furniture, every object, every image and book assumes a new and different presence: they are there and yet not there. The space, on the other hand, takes on a distinct quality, its dimensions accentuated or distorted. Barragán's specific decisions in arranging the components of each ambience in this or that precise manner are underlined or subverted. The house is taken over. A different reality inhabits it: it is given an unsuspected reading.

Ugarte's work often proposes a vision that leads, with lightness and serenity, to other ways of learning the surroundings. Sometimes he works by subtraction: he reduces the artistic action to a minimum and his work takes on unexpected expressive force. He leads the viewer to focus on the invisible. He establishes a subtle discourse that cleanses the spectator's ability to see. And in this way he offers access to a distinct and parallel, absolutely personal reality.

Light -its effects and interplay- is perhaps the central element of this appropriation. The result of the exercise: the transformation of each object into a mirror that receives and emits light, that reflects the space and transforms it, and in which at times the very image of each spectator appears. As in the spheres that Barragán himself obsessively installed in his architecture. The house itself is a machine carefully designed to process light, to accentuate certain qualities and effects of space, of silence. The reading proposed by Ugarte temporarily modifies this machinery, or empowers it, transforming it into *something else*.

Francisco Ugarte produces pieces apparently free of a narrative discourse. A more careful reading, however, reveals an intentionality that leads to deeper layers of meaning. There is a highly autobiographical component in his efforts to create personal interstices, ways of escape to places of memory or imagination. He returns incessantly to the memory of motes of dust floating in a shaft of light.

Three videos are projected repeatedly on the walls of the studio as an integral part of the intervention: the sands at Sayula and two moments from the reservoir in the Sierra de Tapalpa. Contemplations and transfigurations that inevitably recall the very roots that, many years before, also nourished Barragán's sensibility.

Barragán's house is haunted by invisible presences. Many have vanished, others remain. Francisco Ugarte calls them together through his work. And felicitously adds other new ones. By apparently going against everything the house represents in the Mexican imagination, he adds a new layer of meaning, another vein of interpretation. The sands at Sayula contain ephemeral mirrors dried up by the sun. The desert, then, allows one's sight to extend farther, to contemplate the motes of dust and the variations of sunlight. It opens the space of what is possible, of what is not there. Through this intervention into Barragán's house, the fertile desert grows.