

Slab, Juan. "Daniel Canogar: "We are not made for the world we have created," *Publico*, December 16, 2017.



## Daniel Canogar: "We are not made for the world we have created"

by Juan Slab



It has already happened. If we imagine it, it is because you can already buy it. Something has pertained when fragrances are sold with the smell of a new Mac. Something is not right when a corner without wifi becomes an oasis of peace. The artist Daniel Canogar (Madrid, 1964) speaks to us in *Fluctuations* (Sala Alcalá 31) of our own drift as a civilization. He does so by reflecting on the obsession with the ephemeral in the era of programmed obsolescence.

Disseminated computer keys that catch fire under a beam of lights, hundreds of DVDs hanging flyers take off air, multiform screens impossible to decode ... The technological archeology that brings us Canogar has a trap and is called beauty . The aesthetics at the service of the denunciation, or at least of stopping to think that there is something that does not finish working, that has been deconfigured . "We live in a perpetual distraction, bombarded with information, my strategy is to catch the eye a little, to make the public stop and observe."

Why 'Fluctuations'?

It emerged in collaboration with the German curator Sabine Himmelsbach, both of us realized that in my proposal there is a certain interest in the circulation of information and also in how it has mutated our way of storing it through that virtualization and dematerialization imposed by the cloud . We barely have physical supports, the information is no longer having a material consistency and, in that sense, I think there is a huge uncertainty of where we are going. We thought that the word fluctuations captured that poetry, that fast transit, that flow in which nothing remains.

How does that dematerialization affect us?

To begin with, it affects us directly in our way of relating to our environment, it is increasingly difficult for us to communicate face to face, we tend to use Facebook, WhatsApp, emails ... And also in the way we understand our position in the world, in how we see it and live it. We inhabit technological bubbles and it seems that we forget that we still have a body, that we are not pure digital cyborg. A body that feels, listens and suffers, is where the contradiction lies, in the fact that we are not made for the world that we have created.

Do you think there is a lack of theoretical reflection, that we embrace technology in an uncritical way?

Definitely. I also think that the obsolescence that really concerns us is ours. When we buy a mobile for example, we take it out of the box and perceive the new smell of that glowing device, without blemish, in reality it is as if we bought a little youth, as if we fulfilled an unconscious desire for immortality.

“The obsolescence that really concerns us is ours”

The problem is that this mobile ends up deteriorating, in such a way that we feel the need for another novelty shot. It is part of the engagement of this throwaway society in which we are immersed; We live in a constant update and that creates a lot of anxiety. All this, after all, is related to a fear of emptiness and silence.

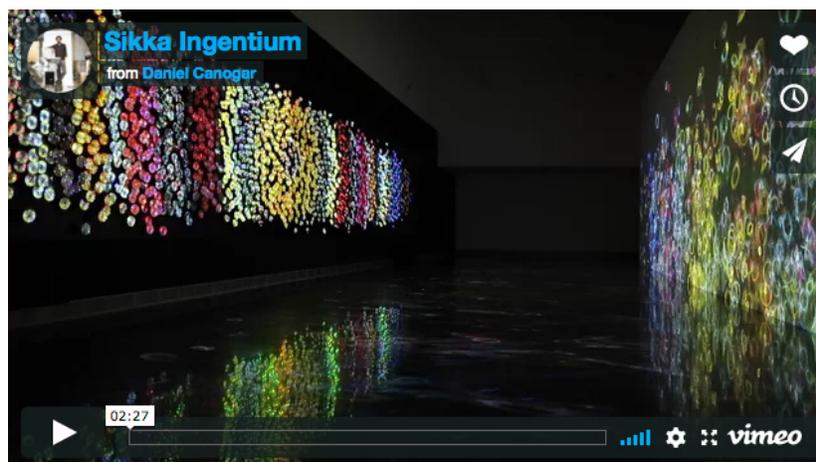
That continuous feeling that we miss something ...

That's right, the world without Wi-Fi will end up becoming an oasis that we will have to create. One of the central nuclei of my work is that memory eroded by that bombardment, that never being here and always feeling that we miss something. The fact that we are constantly exposed to diverse inputs ends up eroding memory, we are no longer able -to try to- to store very basic data, and this results in a kind of collective Alzheimer's, we lose the sensation and the weight of time. It is as if we forgot the traces left by the past, a traces that are key to knowing where we are going. In this sense, Fluctuations is an attempt to preserve a certain personal and collective memory that is closely linked to technologies.

You choose to aesthetize what hurts us as a society when the usual thing is to show it in all its rawness.

I think that hard images have their place, but maybe they have lost some power precisely because they have been used to the full. Many of my works are, indeed, very beautiful. I do it in a conscious way, I like that convulsive beauty, but above all the notion of catching the public's gaze. We live in a perpetual distraction, bombarded with information, this complicates the possibility of keeping a look for more than thirty seconds on the same thing. In that sense, my strategy is to catch that look a bit, make the audience stop, observe and reflect.

On the other hand, every artist is a child who likes to play, invent, transform things and give them a new usefulness. Why should a screen always have to be flat and rectangular? Why can not it have a sculptural form? Why can not that screen surround us or dialogue with the space that surrounds it? A very important element within this beautiful experience is the possibility of moving through the work, or that it is projected on the body, I think that in this way you can create very suggestive dialectics.



How do you establish this dialogue taking into account the generational split?

I belong to a generation bridge between the analog and the digital. For me to know a world in which technology is obsolete so quickly is a new phenomenon. I work a lot with young people through workshops and courses, I perceive their concern for this new reality that is so addictive that it is created with social networks and mobile phones. In that sense, there is a certain rebellion that is already materializing through a fascination on the part of analogical technologies. A clear example is the renewed interest in vinyl.

It seems that even the walkman is coming back ...

Yes, it returns almost become a fetish. Now the most hipster hydroster in California uses a prehistoric Nokia model to communicate. There is a search for other times fruit of a feeling of exhaustion and addiction.

Do you perceive an attempt to slow down our vital rhythm?

I think an awakening is taking place. Of course not on a massive level, but in small, culturally sophisticated redoubts.

What do you feel when a visitor makes a selfie with his background work?

I find it very interesting. It is as if they were inserted in the work of art, it has something of territorial, as if they put their mark on what I try to represent. I come from the world of installation, an area that has that look like diving into the work. The selfie emphasizes that immersive character and, at the same time, it is still a self-portrait, a genre that is really very old. That hybrid seems very interesting to me and I'm still processing it.

It has generated a stir in the US for the painting 'The Dream of Teresa', by Balthus. Do you think that Puritanism is taking its toll on art?

I am not clear that we are facing a puritanical reaction. I think it's more about a change that is taking place on the part of many women who are tired of having men objectify them and turn them into sex toys. From my point of view, we are not facing a Puritan look, but rather the need to begin to reflect on these paintings and see them from another perspective. In the end, what interests me in this debate is that art is not something static, but that the interpretations that people draw from works change throughout history.

The works are read differently depending on the time, respond to different needs, are chameleon. At this moment, the works of Balthus are a very good tool for certain feminist demands. Does this mean that the initial meaning of the work or the intentionality of the artist is being perverted? I believe that no, when I launch a work of art it is no longer mine, it is exposed to thousands of interpretations. He already said it -among others- Roland Barthes when he talked about the death of the author; in that rereading that each one makes of the work is giving him a new life.

It is the look that gives it meaning ...

Exactly, and right now the feminist look is the one that is reconfiguring the way of looking at this work in particular.