

## OBSERVATORY

Vicky Uslé Civera

In this new suite of works, motion is disclosed as one of the keys to Vicky Uslé's painterly vernacular. It acts like torsion in the phrasing and rhythm within the space of the painting that leads to new openings, additions and possibilities: an opening of narrative windows, a shift in impossible axes, a friction of surfaces, accommodation of germinal forms, points of encounter, penetration of spaces... An invitation to enter into a string of successive rooms where different events are taking place. An opening onto possible places for painting to explore.

According to the artist, there are no pictures, just painting in motion where everything is part of a whole. They are all connected, one with the other and then the next. Bonds and ties are woven between them. They are like speakers in the one dialogue even though it is split into different, often simultaneous conversations.

The movement of the body is necessarily incorporated into Vicky Uslé's practice. The body has its own memory and Uslé uses it in her dialogue with painting, transmuted into a kind of choreography of forms and events within the picture. She herself engages with the mobile spaces she creates inside the canvas, which at once is also in motion. They are weightless spaces.

Having said that, these places often expand to the edge, the very limit of the painting, through lines and surfaces that also act as ballast, an anchor preventing the vessel from drifting.

The movement in the paintings from *Observatory* is slightly different to that in the preceding ones. We have spoken before on several occasions of the importance you lend to body movement, to expression on the physical plane. In fact, for a period in your life you were a dancer and Germana Civera's work has always been central to your way of thinking. Through her you met Janet Panetta, with whom you learned to work with body movement in a non-academic fashion. You told me that you are now rediscovering body movement in painting, with a type of choreography that can be translated to the painting. In dance you were quick and easy, but in painting this obviously translates differently. Can you tell us how you resolve this choreography in the picture?

The body is pure motion. I approach the painting with the body, but in a different way. Whenever I paint, the memory of the body's movement rises to the surface. You could say that I am not painting with my arm and hand but with the body.

Once the first brushstroke touches the canvas, a whole chain of events is set in motion. Very often I let myself be guided by intuition, moving as if I were engrossed and totally caught up in the moment. Other times I let myself fall into a repetition of brushstrokes, which is exactly the opposite. In this process I don't work trying to reproduce a specific image, because that would interfere in the rhythm and I would tighten up.

After making the first strokes or stains, I stand back and look, observe and wait. I wait for the moment when the gaze settles on the point where a link can be made. I then pick up the brush again, get back into a rhythm and start all over again.

When I see the spaces that start to appear and the paintings begin to take shape, I then view them with other eyes. In these moments of pause or waiting when I give myself over to observation, I usually look for another language that will let me approach the painting from another angle. This ensures a certain distance and a fresh vision. Once again, I ponder the brushwork so far, move around the picture, looking for a situation that will work.

I try to facilitate a coming together between the brushwork and the cooler or more geometric forms or surfaces. I then open a kind of window that works in the opposite direction to the strokes. These planes act as windows onto alternative worlds or realities. It's like looking into an interior or onto an outside, depending on how you want to interpret it. They dialogue perfectly with my gestural brushwork.

This confluence was a key finding in the previous suite included in the exhibition *Weightlessness Encounter*. Other times it is a starting point, a moment when time is put on hold and you wait for the link, the coupling and movement to appear. These two languages rest on one another to create a dialogue between the tangible, the solid, the opaque and the volatile and light.

The end result would seem to be a habitat of improbable buildings, mazes with no way out, superimposed and confronting dimensions, in other words, impossible spaces. Initially they don't seem to make any sense, aimlessly dancing but with a logic all of their own. The apparent interruptions end up being the very makeup of the painting. Yet there is no sense of hostility, only the impossibility of the place. The beauty of what does not fit together entirely is that it forces you to ask why not. Despite everything, these spaces fuse together as if they were one. They are penetrable.

*In recent years you have had several exhibitions with work on paper as well as on canvas. To your way of thinking, what is the difference when addressing these two supports?*

Canvas instils more respect. In the dialogue with the painting you come up against monsters you don't want to face. It involves greater risk. It forces you to move around it, to move closer and to pull away, which is another type of choreography. Sometimes it is vertical

and you face it front-on while other times it is horizontal and you are looking at it from above. It's like another way of looking at yourself. But always in motion. You can never relax. It takes you by surprise, because it shows you things that you never knew you could do. On the other hand, paper is a known quantity with which you have a one-to-one conversation; it gives you confidence and energy.

*Can you tell us how your work in Observatory came about? Did you have a preset idea or did the painting come into being during the process?*

These pictures came into being little by little following an observation of what went before them, which was seen in the Weightlessness Encounter exhibition. Given the process of painting that I work with, there are many loose threads left over from preceding works which are then tied up in the following ones. This form of dialogue creates its own language as it takes place. It develops from a detail, from a form or a previous brushstroke. By observing how they function together, at the point where they meet the preceding painting—even though it might only be through a little detail—these interactions take on greater weight in the following one. Either by increasing in size, or by unleashing ideas that I start to apply more and more. In this way they give rise to a new conversation.

Before starting, I run my hand over the surface of the canvas. I'm looking for any imperfections after having first sanded it. I like the fact that the texture reminds me of paper. That's why the surfaces I prepare are usually very polished. In this way when the paint makes contact with the canvas it is absorbed fairly homogeneously.

*Above and beyond the painterly atmosphere you create in the background, the forms populating your painting shift between sculptural object and architectural construction. Sometimes it seems as if one can distinguish the surfaces or scaffolding that sustains them. In both cases they are seen floating over an atmospheric void. How do you conceive these forms or constructions? Do they have some kind of symbolism? How do they interact with the space they inhabit? Any kind of inner space seems impossible in them, as if they were closed and impenetrable, though that is not the case. Nonetheless, the outside space is completely free and accessible. What do these constructions enclose?*

Weightless gravity. The architectural structures gradually take shape as I work. Sometimes they come from a specific idea or image that captured my attention for some reason and I follow it. Others come from nowhere, without thinking, just letting myself be carried along. Observing how I construct them, I decide whether to continue with this impossibility or whether to give it form and possibility (possible architecture). Again, I take in air and when breathing out, I touch the canvas with the first brushstroke and continue aimlessly, creating layers as if they were skins, keeping myself inside and outside these structures, opening windows.

A window is very important, as it is the place in which I can lose myself within the paintings (which are bigger than me) and it means I don't have to take control. I don't mark boundaries, but to a certain extent seeing or looking from an uncomfortable position forces me to react and to take my time to think, meditate and then change. Always in search of the unknown.

The structures take on a form and a weight which would be impossible in another reality. Here they float, they move effortlessly between the spaces that are over a ground, that strive not to be one but many. The superimposition of structure upon structure, layer on layer, and transparency on transparency, gradually creates intermediary and interchangeable dimensions and spaces that allow what is in the background to come to the fore. They thus create a field that is, in fact, penetrable although it seems to be closed inside. It is tangible and mouldable. It invites you to enter. To form part of the surrounding environs we are contemplating, to be part of it.

*Your colours seem to suggest different registers in your painting, sometimes almost in opposition or in contrast to the limit. They shift between the density of the oil of dirty, mixed colours that tend towards darkness, and the lightness of diluted paint or the density of flat painting that constructs surfaces which are sometimes transparent, sometimes solid, to close these strange architectures. Between darkness and brightness. Can you talk about the use of colour in your painting?*

I am interested in light, transparency and luminosity. What I see through the window has to do with the choice of colours. Colours come from outside, where we also are. They come from nature, from moods and seasons. In fact, if you notice, I organise my oils in ranges and tones on a shelf by the window.

I am fascinated by the texture, though I don't usually impasto the canvas. And I am interested in the mix of colours; the way in which they blend together, as well as what you find in between: the traces left behind when they mix, the remains of the mixture in this new colour. What can barely be seen.

*The time within the picture seems to recognise the limits of its surface, a process of trial and error without any preconceived direction, like a kind of inner drifting. Is there a place for chance, for discovery, in this process? What role do you give to chance in your practice?*

Chance is always a part of what I do. It is what lets me see what I cannot see.

*What's your relationship with the painting? How would you express it in terms of empathy? What is your bond with painting? What I mean to say is, what is it that hooks you and makes you keep painting?*

Respect. I used to look at the blank canvas with respect and fear. But it was precisely that fear that made me lose it. The time I dedicate to working in the studio, the uneasy solitude in which fears and insecurities arise is what allows me to take pleasure and reveals to me what painting has to teach. Then I realise that we are the same thing. We gradually give shape to each other, creating little by little, one and the other.

I don't like to lose momentum. That moment when you discover something you hadn't seen before. It could be a typical flaw which transforms into a new idea that finally ends up bringing the painting together. That's when you feel as if you could continue painting and painting without stop. Everything flows, you start painting on one, two, three canvases at once and suddenly you turn around and that's it, there is no more. But it's OK because you look, observe and see something that captures your attention. And you go for it. You keep going and you are still not aware of the passing time or of anything else. Except for what appears. And suddenly you get a whiff of turpentine, you open the window, breath in the fresh outdoor air, feel the cold, look at the forest in the distance, disconnect for a second, leave the window open, and turn around to the group that you have briefly forgotten for a few seconds. You haven't lost it, you keep going. And you return.

Then I realise that you have opened not just one window, but several. Various windows onto different dimensions that let me see and feel inside and outside at the same time. And from outside I think that my studio is like an observatory.

Conversation between Vicky Uslé and Mónica Carballas during December 2014 between Saro and Pisueña.