

Images:
Dead Animals (Detail), 2017
Pencil on paper and steel pieces
Photograph: Agustín Garza

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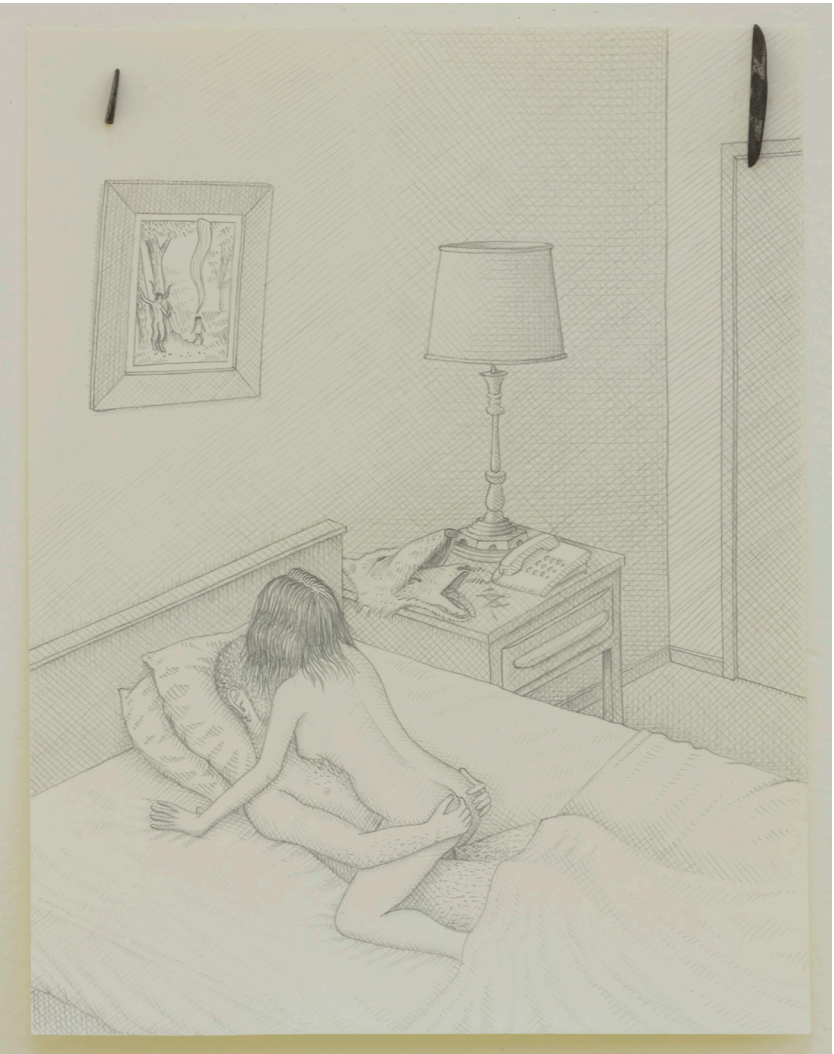
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JORGE SATORRE

Through drawings and manual processes, Jorge Satorre investigates stories and incidents that have often been unnoticed within their general context. Whether they are omissions in the memory of a place or recurring mental images for the artist, these elements become an exercise of reinterpretation that offers new clues to be disentangled by visitors to the exhibition, and from which they can infer their own version of the story. *Dead Animals*, the project that Satorre developed for the Museo Tamayo, creates a scene in which two wolves chase a sheep across a series of still wet clay tiles. This being the result of a series of mental connections set by the artist, the curators of the exhibition talked to Satorre about the possible origins and readings of the elements present in this installation.

DEAD ANIMALS

3 OCT. 2017 — 18 FEB. 2018



MUSEOTAMAYO

The first and central part of this project is a clay flooring that, it could be said, records and tells a story. The most obvious aspect is that of two animals chasing their prey, but there is also another story related to the production of the tiles. How does your conception of the work relate to the way the clay is worked?

From the outset, when I decided that the main work of the exhibition would be a flooring, it became essential for me that it were functional. I wanted to conform myself as much as possible to a real situation in which this would have occurred: that some clay tiles drying outdoors were stepped upon by an animal during the night. A common accident in the production of this kind of flooring. The reason why I was interested in that the flooring could be trodden on is that, in most of these cases, the damaged tiles are discarded, especially if something like this has happened. It's a huge waste! It's not that a few footprints have appeared, but that a large part of the flooring has been marked. I wanted to put myself in the role of the person that makes the flooring and who faces the dilemma of whether to put the material on sale or discard it. When those questions arise, a paradox is created for the workers since, on the one hand, they are disappointed by the accident and, on the other, this is one of the few occasions when the artisans can look at themselves and identify themselves in their work. In this context, they can turn their back on the system and begin to produce a unique object. For me, those accidents or anomalies reveal a kind of subconscious of the cultural system in which the artisan works.



Dead Animals (Detail), 2017
Animal's footprints on clay tiles
Photograph: Agustín Garza

There is also the scene of the wolves pursuing the sheep. Where did that idea come from?

From a recurring and very violent image in my head of one animal chasing another, trapping it and killing it. I don't recognize what kind of animals they are, and the decision to use a wolf and a sheep came later. It is the kind of mental image that one does not understand nor knows where it comes from. These are not dreams, because I have them in my daily life.

What we see is not a representation of this image, or an acting out of it, but a series of footprints, the traces of an event. The footprint is precisely an important element for Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg, one of the central references of your work. Do these footprints have anything to do with his historiographical theories?

Yes, one of the important ideas behind this work is a quote from Ginzburg in which he argues that the possible beginning of the narrative act is the figure of a hunter pursuing the footprints of their prey. One could even think that, in an unconscious way, this mental image was provoked by the fascination that I have had for a long time with Ginzburg's proposition.

When deciding that I wanted to work on that scene, in relation to the quote, I asked myself what kind of animal I could use. As I said, what I see in my head are not specific animals; what is clear for me is that there is a very strong relationship of power, where there is a huge abuse and the easiness for a savage killing. The theme of the wolf and the sheep seemed a good option to me due to the strong meaning that it has. It is a stereotypical story used in many cultures: we find it in fables, with political, cultural and religious connotations, and it was therefore a good starting point to be able to map out how this story (in this case, the underlying example that Ginzburg suggests) can be nurtured and how it grows with time.

I thought it was nice to imagine, on the one hand, the hunt and the killing in a natural state in the countryside, as it used to happen thousands of years ago, contrasted with this other side that we have filled with meaning. We have always used animals to understand ourselves and I wanted that to happen here as well. One places oneself in the place of the wolf or the sheep, depending on the case. It is clear that this image I see refers to me, although I don't know exactly what it is saying.

In fact, one of the significant characteristics of this piece is that it moves away from certain processes that you have used before. I mean, your previous projects generally started from research into stories about the places in which you work, and in this case the work that we see is not directly related to the museum.

Yes, almost all of the works I have done in recent years stemmed from a contextual dialogue. The main focus was on the place. I have always tried to make personal opinions become important, but it's true that in most cases I start from certain aspects that the place gives me. In contrast, this project consists, in a certain way, in reviewing the work methods I have used throughout the

years, although it is perhaps not so evident at a formal level. There is, at the end of the day, a mise-en-scène of the questions I ask myself regarding different methodologies I have used. I have also tried to dig a little in my head, something I had never allowed myself to do, as it was something almost prohibited for me to explore.



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Could the drawings be seen as part of this exploration, in the sense that they are a series of reinterpretations of the event or of the mental image?

Yes, the drawings work on several levels. I'm interested in the uncomfortable role that they have in the exhibition as a whole. It is a kind of familiar discomfort, perhaps similar to the one that an illustrated book would provoke in a reader, in the sense that you cannot detach yourself from the information that the images are giving you in relation to the text.

In fact, in a meeting I had with Ginzburg, much of the conversation was about that subject: to think about the possibility of a text being autonomous, or whether it is possible to write or read without imagining. His position was to defend that part, and I attacked from my role as an illustrator. My background comes from the editorial sphere to a certain extent, and in exhibitions I play with that. The drawings invite you to imagine what could have happened in relation to all of the effort invested in this flooring, but I can also mix totally objective elements with an absolute fiction.

For me, the drawings are a rich environment in which I can put several ideas to the test.

In some ways my aim is to continue with this work that I was once very interested in, that of the editorial illustrator in its different forms, but within a new context, with the themes that I decide on and within an exhibition format.

So the drawings emerge after the realization and conceptualization of the rest of the pieces?

I don't know if they always do, but in this case the drawings emerged when most decisions had already been taken. In that way, they have a very traditional role, by being a kind of record of what happened. But it couldn't be said that they are a documentation *per se*. Although there is an influence of various things that are outside reality, here the job of deciding the content of the drawings came about toward the end of all of the work.

At the beginning I liked to imagine that there would not be anything other than the flooring, but I thought that the drawings could contribute with a somber weight that was missing. And that influenced greatly in the theme of that semi-documentation.

At the same time, the drawings have quite a particular position within the space. There is a very conscious choice of the place for each one.

As in any exhibition, there is a series of strategies for staging. In this case, the idea was to create a very friendly environment in the gallery despite the apparent emptiness. I wanted there to be a gradual process of discovering other pieces and more and more clues; and as you have more information the theme becomes darker. As all of this work has a sinister character, I wanted the formal solutions to be contrary. This often happens with my drawings, mainly because they are aesthetically friendly, very elaborate and at the same time they can appear innocent at first sight. The idea was also for the flooring and the sculptures to have that fine aspect with a dark undertone.

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In his work, Jorge Satorre (Mexico City, 1979) researches and documents historical events in order to reinterpret them by articulating stories that are initially based on specific situations but that incorporate fictional and subjective elements. In pieces that combine drawings, sculptures and texts, Satorre explores the relations between the creator of stories and images and their readers, showing how the result is transformed by its interpretation. His work has been exhibited in the Casa Luis Barragán, the Kunsthaus Dresden (Germany), the Biennial of the Americas (United States) and the Casa Encendida (Spain), among other spaces.