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Ana Navas

Zigzag & other Ws

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The desire to combine art and life has had a continuous tradition at least since classical modernism. It was particularly cultivated by the post-war avant-garde: In the 1960s, the idea of the open work of art established itself in the sense of activating the viewer and completing the work by involving the audience in media art and happenings. Joseph Beuys developed the idea of social sculpture at that time to create a space in which participation could take place. At the turn of the millennium, this idea of integrating art and life was taken further by the principle of “relational aesthetics”.

The works of Ana Navas set the framework in which the connection of art and life can be thought even further. In her work, she does not start from the idea of the original work of art but explores the constant transformations of aesthetic ideas, forms, and images. Art and life meet not primarily in the completion of the work through the involvement of the viewer, but in the afterlife of artworks – through appropriation and translation of the formal and visual languages that permeate our daily lives. Navas observes these transformations, seizes upon them, and ultimately engages in them herself. She points out the cannibalism of images and forms, the incorporation and recomposition of aesthetic signs from the reservoir of modernity. Thus, in her aesthetic universe, mass-produced household goods meet hand-formed objects, modernist formal vocabulary meets mundane materials, DIY techniques meet oil painting. By bringing these different dimensions together, she questions the relationship between art and everyday life, design, and sculpture, and even between original and copy in a way that is both precise and humorous.

The work *Una fuente iluminada por luces de colores* (A fountain illuminated with colored lights) is reminiscent not only of the colorful fountain named in the title, but also of a female sex organ – or maybe even a spiritually exaggerated cult object. The visual forms that cover the fabric, in turn, pave the way to European modernism, as they make direct reference to the iconic visual language of Sonia Delaunay: Not only did she cover canvases with her signature colorful circles, but even then, she transferred them to fashion and furniture. For the work, Ana Navas used an industrially produced fabric on which a pattern in Delaunay’s style is printed and imitated this very pattern through painterly interventions directly on fabric – a copy of the copy. The use of the artist’s hand here is thus not to be understood in the sense of the painterly genius often attributed to the hand of artists, but rather as another act of translation: the return of forms to the materiality in which they were once developed. The artist herself described this process as follows: “The sequence of this is described in my notes as: manual work / industrial imitation of the first / manual work of my authorship imitating the second.”

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These objects, presented on the wall, are both near and far from us – they offer points of connection for our collective memory and at the same time refuse to be classified into categories. They are simultaneously things, paintings, installations, traces, and beings, in which spheres overlap, meanings and contexts entwine and constantly change in contemplation. They show the artist's play with references, with materials, with mimicry and transformation, and also with utility: the objects not only bring contexts together but are also variously applicable. The textiles are based on objects that, if they were not hanging on the wall, they could completely cover like a costume and thus become wrappings.

Another group of works includes pieces such as *El camino del taller al parque* (The way from the workshop to the park), which are reminiscent of miniature paintings that were widely used from the 17th century onwards to design objects such as jewelry boxes. These paintings on plastic plates or bowls reveal the aesthetic universe, in which Ana Navas feels at home. They are populated with things that surround the artist's life. Primarily created during the pandemic, they act as a kind of atlas into which the collected traces of our material world flow. They bring together different temporalities in one scene that integrates not only pasts but also futures of objects – paving a very unique way to connect art and life.

Luisa Heese