

TAXIO ARDANAZ

Mendia eta gaua

18 May - 30 July 2023

CarrerasMugica is pleased to present, from 18 May through 30 July, *Mendia eta gaua*, Taxio Ardanaz's second solo show at the gallery following *Las condiciones necesarias* in 2017.

Like many of the industrial innovations we have completely incorporated into our everyday lives, formica high pressure laminate was first used in the military industry. It was invented by the US scientists Daniel J. O'Connor and Herbert A. Faber in the early twentieth century as a synthetic insulation material that would act as a substitute for mica—thus its name—in electrical circuits. Four decades later, during the Second World War, the US air force used it to cover propellers and make them more resistant. By the 1970s it was a popular, modern easy-to-clean and hardwearing material that covered kitchen countertops all over the Western world. Its bright flat colours caught the eye and became part and parcel of the domestic imaginary of the time.

When I hear the word formica, I think of the table in my grandmother's house where I had my afternoon snack as a little girl. It was bright green with a black edge. Smooth and shiny.

"Signs of visual communication. Centuries of visual communication" could well be the slogan to explain the use and history of stickers: basically, a text or image printed or stamped on a sheet of vinyl or paper backed with a thin layer of adhesive. And while they were initially used for labelling, in other words, for classifying goods, in the twentieth century they morphed from being merely informational to becoming decoration and, above all else, advertising. In them one can trace the influence of constructivist art and soviet propaganda and its widespread use of posters as an artistic means of communication. A little over four decades later, in the late-seventies, the snappy slogans, cropped shapes and uniform colours would be adopted for new revolutionary and activist purposes. But, beyond the function it served in social ideology, the sticker also ended up being used as another cog in the tools that made the capitalist consumer wheel go round, like marketing.

Back then I believe that everybody—my friends, sisters, cousins, neighbours—collected stickers, which were handed out at every act, event, protest or meeting. I kept them in a box, apart from the repeats, which I stuck on the door of the wardrobe in my bedroom, part of a modular laminate unit.

On 15 June 1977, in the midst of social upheaval, animated by new and old political parties, trade unions, social organizations and activist movements, the first democratic elections were held in Spain. Fraught with tensions and desires, looking back in order to be able to look forward. Among other issues in the Basque Country, there was a battle to compete for a symbolic return: to bring the *Guernica* to Gernika. Now, Picasso's work was not just a symbol of the horror of the violence inflicted upon the people by the rebel army during the Civil War. Its new reading after four decades of dictatorship updated it as an image of the struggle against any hegemonic imposition of power. And also the struggle for the definition of the identity of each people. In the words of Agustín Ibarrola, we would have to speak of the Basque Country's "new guernicas".¹ Later that same year of 1977, in November, Ibarrola unveiled a ten-metre mural in Sala Gris in the Museum of Fine Arts of Bilbao, installed as part of a theatrical *mise en scène*. With a serial rhythm marked by the freestanding abstract panels that both revealed and concealed, in the continuous frieze in the background one could make out the

¹ "Los guernicas de Agustín Ibarrola"

<https://www.agustinibarrola.com/los-guernikas-de-agustin-ibarrola/> (consulted 6/05/2023)

Picassian figures in a new context, far removed from officially-sanctioned interpretations. It struck a new negotiation with the image. An updating of its political vision.

The German Junkers that had bombed the town just four decades earlier also had composite wood and formica propellers. Four decades later, a new street culture strategy came into being known as "sticker bombing", a form of sticker art that covered city walls and doorways with would-be iconic slogans and images conceived to become urban logos.

Just over four decades later, in an attempt to explain the motive that drives him, Taxio Ardanaz, against a backdrop of formica panels with bas-relief abstractions of political stickers from the late-seventies and paintings recovered from other projects in order to finish them now, speaks about formalization from a modular configuration, responding to a working system and not to a specific history or context. Always challenging the archive, he now situates himself in front of an archive of his own unfinished works, searching for the pressure that will unify them as a common ground, coupling practice and potential. Experimentation and introspection as a procedural process ready to be repeated. A libidinal procedure. Prepared for the explosion of flat shiny colours that focuses on a strategy of finding the aesthetic logic that runs in parallel to politics. Recurring images that populate dreams and nightmares. With thick dye and a many-layered background. With the mountain and night ever present.

The inherent potentiality that Ardanaz seeks and advances in his practice is similar to the "tensor sign" as defined by Amador Fernández Savater. A principle of possibility precipitated by "any normal, serialized sign" that mobilizes desire, that awakens a sleeping cell ready for adventure: "When activated, the tensor opens a labyrinthine space-time where possible connections are multiplied, encounters radiate, where we do not know where we are going; each tensor opens a new, incomparable labyrinth (...) the path to the creation of meaning."² In this way, in his painterly, installational project, the meanings of images from cultural heritage endlessly repeated in imaginaries are updated. Embers of fires that are still mouldering. Plausible lights of history for revolutions yet to come that cannot be neutralized by power. Possible guides that, from the eye and the body mobilized by an aesthetic drive, provide tools to cope with new constructions of ways of living.

Marta Ramos-Vzquierdo

Taxio Ardanaz (Pamplona- Iruñea, 1978) graduated in Fine Arts at EHU-UPV (University of the Basque Country) and then furthered his training in a number of workshops and residencies including the Royal Academy of Spain in Rome and Tabakalera Donosti. His solo exhibitions include *CREE CREE CREE* (Galería Pelaires, Palma), *Gora* (Universidad Pública de Navarra), *Las maquinistas* (with Charo Fontalba at Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Huarte) and *Causa* (La Fragua, Tabacalera Promoción del Arte, Madrid, curated by Angel Calvo Ulloa). Noteworthy recent group shows include *Premi Ciutat de Palma Antoni Gelabert d'Arts Visuals 2023*, *Ante el recuerdo desmantelado: memoria y Guerra civil* (Museo de la Paz, Gernika), *Roma Akademia* (Azkuna Zentroa) and *Complexo Colosso* (CIAJG, Guimarães).

² Fernández Savater, Amador, "El tensor: principio de aventura", 17/10/2018
<https://www.filosofiapirata.net/el-tensor-principio-de-aventura/> (consulted 6/05/2023)