

Andrea Büttner

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Before the Wind

by Chus Martínez

In 1969 the US philosopher Stanley Cavell published his first book under the title: *Must We Mean What We Say?* Reading from today's social and political climate the question sounds like a timely provocation. The text investigates how language relates to the body. For example: can two people have the same pain? It is a beautiful question to pose in a time in which we time and again speak of care and empathy as central values on which we can build our life together. The argument Stanley Cavell defends is that it would be misleading to insist on the pain—since it would lead us to assumptions and potentially dangerous misunderstandings. Instead, he suggests we insist on the possibility of imagining a language that another person can not only understand, but which enables us to grasp the dimension of the experience that is being shared. Imagining a language is a beautiful proposition. We too often assume that the word “language” corresponds with words, but it can be a language made of images, or works able to emit emotions. A monochromatic painting, on canvas, with a perimeter of a lighter color, creates an immediate sensation of intensity. The perimeter in a lighter color offers a respite, even a hope, from the possibility of being absorbed by the solid color. Why? Surely there are multiple explanations for the way we perceive light as an element that refers to a larger space, even to infinity. Composing a ceiling with a series of panels surrounded by a halo makes us reflect on the very nature of limits. A paneled ceiling has its own history that many of us have probably given little thought to. Historically, wood and textile ceilings were virtually the only ceilings which a common individual could have, while palaces and churches would have a stone ceiling instead. These provide heat insulation as well as the possibility to decorate them with drawings and religious and spiritual texts or depictions of myths and gods.

What does the rain feel when it falls? The composition of a landscape is the recreation of a mood, of an experience. A landscape created under a ceiling as if the ceiling was a strange sky, perhaps not of this world. Rain is a constant element in the history of Western art. Rain entangles the life of humans with earth, through drops alone. These drops look like tears. Crying, like pain, is supposed to be very personal. Indeed, tears come out of our body as they come out of the clouds, showing us what is inside, revealing what loss and sadness looks like. Ah! These drops are like “intimations of mortality” — as the artist Mark Rothko used to call paintings. The presence of these teardrops brings solace to the exhibition. These wordless tears tell us that here there is room — and form — for our emotions. It is as if Andrea Büttner would like to create an exhibition as a landscape, a template which bonds with our brain patterns, with our intimate inner ways of perceiving and being.

In this cloudless space, the paneled sky reminds us that we are inside a scene composed of several elements and an imagined mood by the artist, Andrea Büttner: a woman sitting on a mattress, at rest, intermittent rain, a different sky. In recent times the harvest has been a recurring motif in her work. The harvest is the result of centuries of hard apprenticeship entailing the domestication of plants and animals and the modification of infinite terrains with one goal: human survival.

The harvest also serves in our western religious culture as a metaphor for work oriented to bearing fruit, where results must always contribute to achieving something more. I do believe that the work of Andrea Büttner possesses the great capacity of imagining a language and gaining a rare eloquence that make us feel the worlds she is interested in.

Imagining languages is primordial in a time when we trust technology with the ability of superseding us. Technology — true — is talking back to us using words and thoughts we expressed before somewhere. I like how we always imagine something superior to us, able to take control of us. Who wants to address poverty or solitude or sadness or hardness or the joy of a ray of light, the halo of light in the darkness of a canvass? It is so difficult — and so fundamental — to address life in all its dimensions, to be able to feel not only pain, but the depths of joy and a sense of freedom that unlocks us, making us generous again, as when we were children.