

# TAKE, RETAKE, AND REMAKE (BACK THE NIGHT)

## MAR GARCÍA ALBERT

“It is here that the critique of authorship is relevant – the critique of the notion of a fully coherent author subject previous to the act of creation, producing a work of art which then becomes merely a mirror or, at best, a vehicle for communicating a fully formed intention and a consciously grasped experience. What I am proposing is that on the one hand we consider the social formation of the producer within class and gender relations, but also recognize the working process or practice as the site of a crucial social interaction between producer and materials.”<sup>1</sup>

This observation by the art historian Griselda Pollock figures among the texts and excerpts that Mar García Albert wanted to share while putting together the current show. On its own, the quotation introduces several critical paths forward that are in fact the directions in which the artist’s work moves, however much it appears kind of thin, even frivolous, in light of its little hearts and Hello Kitty depictions.

This is indeed what touches us in her paintings – like those by Camila Oliveira Fairclough and Owen Piper, who have also exhibited at La Salle de bains. It is the joy given off especially by an art practice linked to life, even in its most banal aspects. This jubilation, introduced by an off-hand gesture subsequently worked to form a smiley face, has nothing to do with satisfaction. Quite the opposite, it conveys an investment in the experience of this “crucial social interaction” with art materials, an experience that is forever curious, risky, and sometimes unsuccessful, not that it matters.

This joyousness then isn’t some false reflection in García Albert’s painting. Nevertheless, her work is underpinned by a conceptual approach, which is itself based on a demanding analysis of the medium along with the social and political history of art.

The artist decided to fully embrace the night motif for this show by referencing a long pictorial tradition that marries formal challenges to the expres-

sion of our spiritual attraction to the shadows. It makes it possible to welcome the ugly and the abject as in Goya’s *Pinturas negras*, his Black Paintings series, turning even further away from the neoclassicism of the period. But the idea also popped into her head of doing a painting on a toilet seat, which she has just done in homage to Lee Lozano, a semantic shift in French that is a bit silly but valid just the same, from *lunette* (toilet seat) to *lune* (moon).

In terms of representation, all that remains of the night are a few star-shaped stickers stuck to the paintings. That’s not counting those faces energetically sketched out in a single color which the title of the show refers to. That title is an adaptation of the name given to the annual march for women’s rights first launched in the United States in the 1970s and still held today, (Women) Take Back the Night. For these portraits, García Albert modeled her work on one of the rare group of documents chronicling these marches, found in the archives of Barnard College, a private women’s college in New York City.

While the paintings featured in the show are contextualized with a reference to militant feminism – along with a row of small mirrors, other *parerga*, i.e., supplementary or related pieces – we can also read in the display a commentary on the politically committed work that the artist would like to set apart from her commitment in painting. In that sense, the speed with which she executes these portraits of anonymous demonstrators runs counter to a current trend in the renewal of figurative painting that is free from all critical debate, especially when it is considered enough to merely ascertain that the artist in question belongs to one or another group identity.<sup>2</sup> The face depicted in pink in the series of women’s portraits seems even to be laughing at the weakness of such a political argument.

It was while reading Lucy Lippard that García Albert became aware of the Take Back the Night marches. In her text called “Issue and Taboo” (1980), the art critic stressed the significant contributions of women to the art of the 1970s, when they helped to introduce social and political subjects and critique the myth of the creative genius by importing into art inappropriate or taboo subjects, that is, related to the material, social, and bodily conditions of art. Night, the time of reproductive work and zone of invisibility, is also a taboo. Like the proletarians Jacques Rancière met, don’t women have other moments than nighttime to get organized as a group, read, write, create?

García Albert is forever making inappropriate and unclean subjects an integral part of her painting, both as a critique of the subject in painting and as references to the conditions of its production. There are all those allusions to

cleanliness, i.e., brushes that match the colors on a painting and especially toilet paper motifs. Something similar occurs when she begins painting on the plastic wrapping new ready-to-use canvases, as if her life as a mother and worker didn't leave her the time to remove the packaging material.

Besides all the aspects offered by the unpredictable surface according to the quality of the merchandise, the paint applied to the surface layer of the protective film raises deep questions about our assumptions. The old idea that the picture is permeated by the artist's subjectivity or their "fully formed intention" is canceled out along with the commercial value of the painted object. In a word, the picture does not get painted. Nor can it be repainted for it remains available for an initial application of paint. The painted surface makes visible for a limited time the contingency of the practice, deliberately granting greater importance to the experience.

1- Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, London, New York: Routledge, 1988, 82-83.

2- See Larne Abse Gogarty, "Figuring Figuration," *Art Monthly* 465 (April 2023).

Pieces from left to right :

*New Jörg's Kunstverein Window*, 2024  
installation of self-adhesive mirror stickers,  
Variable dimensions

*After after*, 2024  
collage and oil paint on canvas,  
100×70cm

*García Painting*, 2024  
oil paint on plastic-coated canvas  
27×35cm

*Horizontal Landscape*, 2024  
collage and oil paint on plastic-coated canvas  
27×35cm

*Portrait*, 2024  
mixed media, installation, variable dimensions

*After soundtrack piece*, 2024  
oil paint on plastic-coated canvas  
35×27cm

*Rotatable Painting*, 2024  
collage and oil paint on plastic-coated canvas, hinge  
14×18cm

*After Moon Painting*, 2024  
oil paint on plastic-coated canvas  
80×60cm

*Vertical Landscape*, 2024  
collage and oil paint on plastic-coated canvas  
35×27cm

*After Soundtrack Piece*, 2024  
oil paint on plastic-coated canvas  
35×27cm

Mar García Albert (\*1980) lives and works in Paris. She holds an MA from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Her work was presented in solo and group exhibitions, notably at New Jörg Kunstverein, Vienna (2024), Villa Belleville, Paris, Glassbox, Paris, Kunstverein Bielefeld (all in 2023), Doc, Paris (2021), Centre Pompidou, Paris, Centre del Carmen CCCCV, Valencia (both 2020), FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, Kunstverein am Rosa-Luxembourg-Platz, Berlin (both in 2019), Fondation Entreprise Ricard, Paris (2018), and Sala Gran, La Capella, Barcelona (2015).

La Salle de bains reçoit le soutien :  
du Ministère de la Culture DRAC Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes,  
de la Région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes et de la Ville de Lyon.  
Un projet en partenariat avec New Joerg (Vienne, AT), et le  
soutien du Service Culturel de l'Ambassade d'Espagne.