

## Lesió

At Pere Llobera's show *Lesió* at BRADWOLFF PROJECTS in Amsterdam, an installation with two card houses is introduced as a metaphor for a concise and delicate selection of paintings. The fragility of card houses, in combination with the bad reputation of playing cards, made them into a symbol in which several ideas are combined. The unreliability of its structure reflects on the temporariness of life, on the other hand the presence of playing cards suggests a form of cheating and illusion. Nonetheless, the required craft and patience to build a house of cards inspires admiration, resembling the characteristics of a work of art.

Card houses made their appearance before in Llobera's oeuvre, as in the history of art. Pointing to the context of his installation, Llobera says that he often feels like a tragic individual who wastes his time escaping from the chaos and disaster that surrounds him everywhere. All that is valuable to him - family, children growing up, artistic and intellectual integrity, social life - is under constant threat of decay and it is only thanks to his continuous efforts that destruction is avoided. Furthermore, the show is titled *Lesió*, which means 'injury' - or 'blessure' in Dutch - indicating how Llobera's work stems from a feeling that is also known as 'Weltschmerz'.

The result of this existential struggle is a visual domain, highly personal, filled with paradox and ambiguity. This 'Llobera-territory' offers inspiring meetings with his artistic predecessors, while in other corners the smelly remains of failure and trauma are hidden. Painted with amazing skill, funny people carry out eccentric activities - saints have conversations with machines and animals alike - and intriguing visual poems speak of nostalgia and loss. Obsessive discussions are going on here, sometimes messy and chaotic, that express sharp criticism towards the 'achievements' of modern life and the general vision on mankind is not very optimistic. Lastly, the rigorous dismissal of educated taste shelters a diverse family, marrying the cheap and the fancy, clumsiness and virtuosity.

With these contradictions in mind a landscape painting like *Premonición* can trigger a surprising set of ideas and interpretations. The painting that recalls *Mont Saint Victoire* by Cezanne - Pere Llobera says he was looking at Altdorfer - is in reality a picture of a garbage bag folded in the shape of a mountain. This may explain its unattractive looks, its murky colours and blurry strokes. At the same time, the mountain - a garbage bag(!) - is an astonishing painterly achievement, made up of different shades with bright reflections. The work illustrates how difficult it is today to be a 'good' painter. Virtuosity can be a trap, a superficial addiction, and Llobera is aware of this. He personally named the phenomenon *Ensor's Disease* and responded by trashing his prodigious talents, leaving them abandoned on the small canvas of *Premonición* - a masterpiece dressed up as a heap of rubbish.

References to other artists can be encountered more often in his work, sometimes even in unexpected forms. *Caminar com un gegant* (To Walk Like a Giant) shows how Llobera identifies himself with conceptual art, a practice not usually associated with figurative painting. The painting is an almost gentle depiction of the artist in his studio, carrying a large rock above his head. With Sisyphus in mind you know the load will be too heavy soon, but *Caminar com un gegant* also seeks proximity to *Nightfall* by Bas Jan Ader, an artist with whom Llobera feels related. Although his medium is painting, rather than video or performance, his language and, more precisely, his feeling of '*lesió*' is similar to Ader's.

In other works Pere Llobera appears on stage as the tragic focal point of events. Take for instance the rather quirky scene offered by *The Ice Boat / La barca de hielo* in which he stands with his fist up in the air on a floating iceberg. The iceberg is small and wobbly, the figure runs the risk of drowning and a text balloon with an indecipherable message comes out of his mouth. The firmness of the raised fist, quoting the black US athlete Tommy Smith during the Mexico '68 Olympics, suggests an urgent statement, but as Llobera digests the image - its forceful, but also tragic expression - the heroism of the event melts and leaks away. There is no statement anymore, only gesture, and the deserted seascape seems to promise a gloomy future for a protagonist who has embarked on an uncertain voyage.

The autobiographical, an important point of departure for Llobera, expresses itself in diverse forms, independent of his direct presence in the picture. In *Spider Web*, an unusual landscape painting of Amsterdam by night seen from the air, he presents a dark poem as a desirable present, wrapped in shiny velvet. The picture refers to his stay at Rijksakademie Amsterdam, known to be a paradise for artists that creates unique opportunities. However, in exchange for a better career, he saw himself separated from his family for two years, working in his studio like a machine producing artworks. He was making successful paintings, yet the marvels of the Amsterdam canals had turned into a prison from which he wanted to escape. What was supposed to be a paradise, demanded a painful human sacrifice.

In spite of the hardship and several years later, it payed off. His work is included in several collections and represented by galleries in Amsterdam, Barcelona and Madrid. Even there are those who believe that Pere Llobera is a contemporary Goya, the next big thing. Who can tell? Fact is there are not many around like him, artists blessed with virtuoso abilities who don't end up as superficial and predictable. That is an achievement in itself. Yet, Llobera's omnivorous behaviour makes it easy to misinterpret the work, and all the more difficult to contextualize it properly. His territory is rough, full of holes and never perfect, but always human. As he said himself in an interview, Pere Llobera is 'not trying to be cool'.

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BRADWOLFF PROJECTS is an art center located in East Amsterdam,  
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