Portrait. Luis Pérez Oramas

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EDITOR'S NOTE
Translated from the French by Simon Pleasance

Luis Pérez Oramas

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Luis Pérez Oramas (born in Venezuela in 1960) belongs to that family of critics trained in art history (his doctoral thesis on Velázquez was supervised by Louis Marin and Hubert Damisch). As the author of collections of poetry and essays, *La Cocina de Jurassic Park y otros ansaios visuales* deserves special mention. He taught art history at Rennes, Nantes and Caracas before embarking on a curator’s career, focusing on the work of the Venezuelan painter Armando Reverón (1889-1954); he then addressed the issue involving the inclusion of South American artists in international collections and in major international shows: *New Perspectives in Latin American Art, 1930-2006* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2007), *Latin American and Caribbean Art: Highlights from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (Albany, New York State Museum, 2009), *Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2009) and, in 2012, the General Curatorship of the XXXth International Biennial in São Paulo.

His critical work involves a very constructed debate against those who give too much pride of place to iconography. The fact is, he posits, that neither in Titian, nor in Velázquez, nor in any of the important artists, is the pictorial spectacle worked out in this iconic dimension. Based on an analysis of *Las Meninas*, Luis Pérez Oramas demonstrates that well before the crisis of representation occurring at the end of the 19th century, its allpowerfulness was contested by the inclusion of the onlooker in the pictorial arrangement. There then emerged, alongside the representational value, an exhibition value which has been poorly examined by art history. Luis Pérez Oramas provocatively calls it installation, insofar as the onlooker is installed in the arrangement as a condition for effecting that spectacular dimension of all art, to which he wants to attract attention. Connected with a spectator, any work of art perforce occupies a place where the shift from the work of art to the aesthetic experience is achieved. We thus more clearly grasp why Luis Pérez Oramas talks about installation. In his book *La Cocina de Jurassic Park*, the analysis of *Las Meninas* immediately leads to an analysis of Christian Eckart’s installation *The Power Chord Cycle* (1993), which enables him to posit that art can be thought of both as artwork and as aesthetic event. So it is in the objective conditions of the presence of the work, in its phenomenology, that the viewer takes cognizance of art’s two sides. He is faced with the impossibility of the mimetic truth, but he sees himself offered, over and above the false evidence of mimesis, the possibility of existing as an onlooking subject, as an onlooker. If the illusions of semiotic transparency are done away with, an area of self-reflexivity is, conversely, established in the place of the installation.

We can clearly see how the critical idea, originally expressed about 17th century figurative painting, culminates in the contemporary situation. The installation takes note of the shipwreck of the illusion constructed by easel painting, in accordance with which there might exist a fully autonomous world of images, a per se of the icon. By making it obvious that, from the end of the Renaissance, artists realized that things could not be this way, and that at that time, already, the onlooker was included in the picture, they have constructed an epistemic field of reflection. Nowadays, installations are pursuing this line by proposing an alternative to the picture, and by setting up systems and arrangements where art no longer claims to be escaping from its place, and where it even lays claim to it as a self-reflexive dimension of its praxis. This epistemic dimension of Luis Pérez Oramas’s work roundly underwrites his critical engagement.
NOTES


3. See, among others, his essays:
   - *Armando Reverón, de los prodigios de la luz a los trabajos del arte*, Caracas: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Sofía Imber, 1990
   - *La Construcción de un personaje. Imágenes de Armando Reverón*, Caracas: Proyecto Armando Reverón (PAR), 2004