

Exhibition October 21, 2022 – May 16, 2023

Parque del Retiro, Palacio de Velázquez

Manolo Quejido

Immeasurable Distance



Sin nombre nº 84: Psiquiátrico (Nameless No. 84: Psychiatric Hospital), 1998, Collection Mariano Yera, © Manolo Quejido, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022

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Immeasurable Distance features a selection of works by Manolo Quejido (b. 1946, Seville) created over the course of more than five decades. The exhibition begins with the series *Deliriums*, *Siluetas* (Silhouettes), and *Secuencias* (Sequences) (1969–74), black-and-white reductions of the three approaches the artist took to his work when starting out in 1964: Expressionism, Pop Art, and geometric experimentation. When Quejido breaks with these approaches, in works like *Risas* (Laughter), *Levitaciones* (Levitations), and *Mutaciones* (Mutations), we begin to already see the return to painting that would soon take place in the art world at the time.

In his subsequent pieces, *Cartulinas* (Cardboards, 1974–78), Quejido touches on all of the possibilities of representation—from everyday objects to abstract landscapes and linguistic allegories. In doing so, and in contrast to series that focus on more specific content, like *Secuencias*, Quejido unleashes the potential multiplicity of his works. Each one of his *Cartulinas* is so unique that it seems to give rise to a new species of its own. These pieces thus offer a glimpse of a vast distance: the distance between the things that already exist among us and those that will erupt into our world through art.

At the dawn of the 1980s, Quejido turned to large-scale compositional painting. He studied the painting tradition within the, for example, (at times Fauvist) exuberant use of color and of recurring themes, such as rural scenes or portraits of seated

figures, now stripped of all majesty or heroism. The focal distance in works like *La familia* (The Family) or *El pozo* (The Well) (both from 1980) tends to be shortened, and the entire composition tends toward a flatness that corresponds to the flatness of all paintings, into which we cannot enter. For example, the monumental representation of doors in *PF* (1979–80) and *IP* (1980) addresses the fundamental separation between our surroundings and the universe of the canvas. It also highlights the tremendous difference between the two spaces: ours and that of what is painted in the painting, which is not necessarily subject to distances or measurement.

Quejido also poses the question of the painting as a cavity that could potentially be occupied: he explores everything that can fit on the surface of the canvas. For example, in the series *Tabiques* (Partition



Mi sitio (My Place), 1978, Collection Mercedes Buades,
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La pintura (Painting), 2002, Private collection,
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Walls, 1990–91), he juxtaposes incompatible perspectival systems so that depth and flatness come together while they continue to draw attention to the partition or wall that comes between us and the other side of each painting. At the same time, his *Tabiques* also reflect on Diego de Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. If in *Las Meninas* the idea was to make painting “supremely real,” in Quejido's words, the *Tabiques* move away from the formal qualities of realism. They in no way aspire to aerial perspective, and they lay bare the tactics of art that seeks to appear natural to us.

Quejido's work has also gone in other directions, such as his interest in the immediate contiguity between painting and what is painted. In *La pintura* (Painting, 2002), he shows us this minimal distance in which everything (hand, pigment, and painted canvas; what is done and the doing) merges together all at once, creating the act and effect of painting. He presents painting itself—understood as an art and as the historical legacy of painting—as painter, as the one who has painted everything. And as a result, painters are simply “painters” that painting has at its disposal.

Since the late 1980s, Quejido has analyzed this peculiar situation that “painters” find themselves in with respect to their craft, considering the history of this discipline as a system. Therefore, he locates other painters (and, tentatively, himself) in a sort of map or diagram with a chronological trajectory. Both facets of his system, map and diagram, are



Tabique IX (Partition Wall IX), 1990–91, Collection Enaire Arte Contemporáneo, © Manolo Quejido, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022

about determining what painting is and has been, in terms of possibility and of historical manifestation. In some cases, like *30 bombillas* (30 Light Bulbs, 2010), artists appear in the diagram as lamps, alluding to each painting's ability to *alumbrar*, to shed light and give birth.

Illuminations and births allow the artist to revive his work: in the series *Nacer pintor* (Being Born a Painter), which he has worked on since 1993, Manolo Quejido condenses the motifs of his 1980s works into a narrative grouping that gives them a new meaning. It is an act of painting that is reborn. And it is no coincidence that painting—like the headwaters where a river is “born”—is the site of continuous birth.

The continuous birth of painting is also, for Quejido, a continual act of thinking. Indeed his work often oscillates between



IP, 1980, Private collection, © Manolo Quejido, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022

thinking and “paintment,” between the idea and its incarnation in paint. This has been true since very early works, such as the trio of cardboards *Matilde disimula un pensamiento* (Matilde Conceals a Thought, 1974).

When describing how he works, Quejido tends to add *feeling* to painting/thinking. More notably, in the 1990s this feeling was a condemnation of what he called a world in a state of “generalized mediation,” where the media interceded between the striking nature of the present moment and us. For example, in the series *Sin nombre* (Nameless, 1997–98), Quejido translated press photographs into painting. In doing so, he countered their ephemeral nature and the sterile patina with which images are replicated in newspapers over and over again. Years later, he will find a way out of the narrow trap of mediation: the radical affirmation

of laughing, playing, and dancing, as suggested in the series *Por CubAndo* (Walking Through Cuba, 2009–10).

The exhibition concludes with the piece *Fin* (End, 2014), which Quejido created just before heading in new directions. He had already established that painting is much more than the painter who creates it. In this work, the word *fin* can barely be made out against the blank white background, pointing toward another of Manolo Quejido's ideas: what he calls

a giving emptiness, the condition of possibility for creation. It is like the easels with blank canvases that appear in all of the *Tabiques*: vortexes of art, immensely capacious. Nonmetrical topologies of painting, immeasurable distances.

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