

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE GAZE. A CONVERSATION WITH JORDI FULLA.

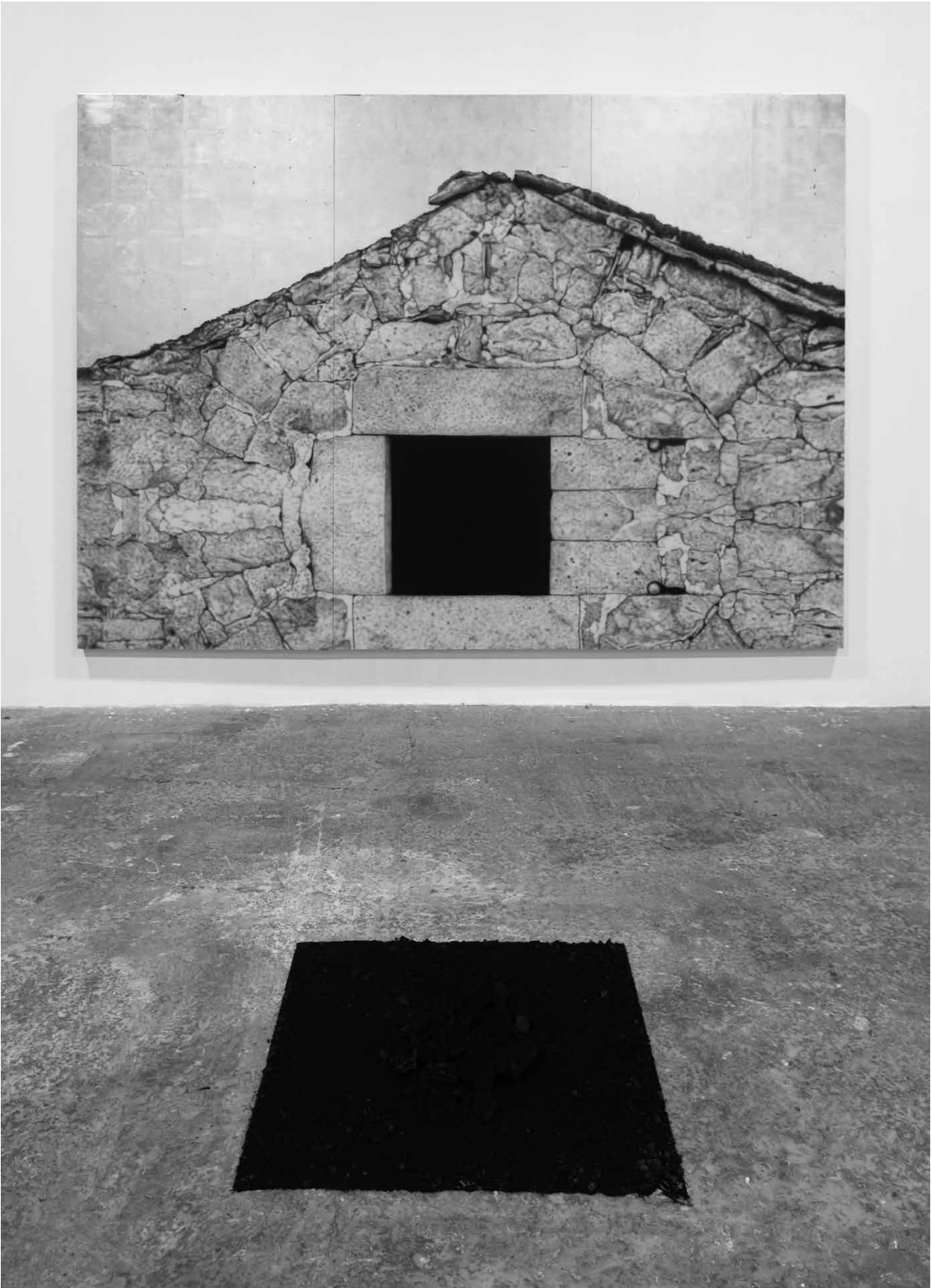
by Natàlia Chocarro,
Head of Press and Communication and
Deputy Art Director for the *Fundació Vila Casas*

“Thresholds to a fixed point in a world that turns” is the latest artistic venture by Jordi Fulla (Igualada, 1967), as part of the Fundació Vila Casas’ programme Itiner’ART. His work maps out the stone architecture of rural landscapes found in the Mediterranean basin in various exhibitions held throughout the region. Known as cabanes de pedra seca or dry-stone huts, these examples of ancestral architecture act as sites of communion between the land and the sky, placing man at a fixed point from which to view the universe.

On the occasion of your exhibition at the Espai Volart in 2011, you wrote that the root of memory is found in childhood, a place to which we always return, because it is where all those unopened boxes that inhabit our subconscious, are to be found. These boxes, the drawers to which Bergson alludes, present themselves as intimate spaces that allow you to recompose lost worlds which, thanks to a combination of seemingly disconnected specific facts, emerge timidly to the surface. This moment is revealed to you as something magical and makes you realise that everything is intimately related. Since that school drawing, which you’ve kept, of a little yellow chicken, the one you had to colour in, without going over the lines, in coloured pencils, lines which you traversed in the search, even then, for a concept of space, to the current dry-stone constructions, where you also confront a concept of the cosmos. What pathway have you followed?

The path I’ve followed has always been a tentative one, –and in fact that’s the way I like it, I really like the image of the blind man’s cane, that never stops probing the limits of the air, of the atmosphere.

When I lived in Paris, aside from painting I also wrote, and curiously this really helped to outline the visual journey I have undertaken over the last 25 years. The text *Batòn d’aveugle* [White cane] dates from then, and I also put on two exhibitions at that time, “*Une chambre pour un seul aveugle I, II*” [A room for one sole blind man I, II], that marked a turning-point for ever more in my work, timidly proposing the beginning of something. The image that pinpointed everything in those exhibitions was the photograph I took of an isolated, three-storey house, all boarded up, in the centre of Paris (Rue de Fourcy). It enthralled me and I went to look





at it often. I liked the idea of that closed container and imagined it as the dark room of a blind man, who seeks pure and real images within himself. A few years after that project, and that photograph, the building was knocked down, and conserving the garden, a building was built in the same place and of the same size. A building with no windows, once again a container, which since then has been the *Maison Européenne de la Photographie*. Curious coincidences, the poetics of the construction of thought... I've always believed that reality doesn't exist, that it's visible only in those moments when interferences are produced. There, in the Rue de Fourcy, a permanently closed building, a space without light, the blind man's room... opened my eyes to investigating the impossibility of ever seeing reality, of touching it, believing it. I understood that we could

only ever move forward tentatively, like the blind man, as in a painting, where you rarely manage to come even close to caressing your objectives.

I've never dared to enter the *Maison Européenne de la Photographie*; I won't find reality in there. I, myself, would divide these little boxes of our interior between those that configure us in childhood (the root) and those that autonomously contain the gazes, interferences, and words that have arisen during our journey, that are awaiting reorganization.

The processes of introspection are, in this sense, tools of knowledge that enable us to confront the anxiety of existence. The body as a container of particles of memories, dispersed in our interior; the stone hut as a receptive chamber for the positing of time. The exhibition "Thresholds to a fixed point



in a world that turns” stems from a specific type of construction whereby storage and shelter, aside from their functional purpose, become catalysing elements for space and time. These architectures understood as intimate habitats make it possible to establish a transposition of what is human: in the words of Gaston Bachelard in the Poetics of Space, the walls behind which we take shelter form a space for the human soul. Beyond the constructive rationality, the house is the scenario that propitiates our dream states where we project a space of refuge, isolation, reflection... In previous works you expressed the idea of intimacy through a total symbiosis of the tangible and immaterial world, in which you embrace endeavouring, perhaps, to understand what our place is in the world.

Yes, for me this sort of four walls, construction, or container, is vital; I un-

derstand it as the closest thing to what would be our skin. I don't think our body has a frontier in our own skin; the atmosphere that surrounds us is charged with everything we give off, and everything that of which we are made. The construction of this personal cabin, as far as I understand it, is necessary not to protect us so much as to mark out a space of reflection, because it's impossible to understand the universe from the outside... we're just too insignificant. Artists have different characteristics, I'm the kind that's inside the studio; from there I can better perceive the movement of ideas. As you know I have three studios in different places, for different moments, and different propositions. It's a perpetual obsession of mine to construct the ideal space, I always find myself imagining building the definitive space.

Looking back over your career I found out that in the 90s you elaborated a series around cabins, and with a nod towards the American artist Jackson Pollock, you named it "La cabana de Jackson". We probably ought to link this piece as well to the commission you received when you were still a student, which led you to scout the Catalan territory, defining popular names for elements in the landscape and all those, often abandoned, rural constructions, which emanate from the earth and seem to form part of the territory itself.

Yes, that job, quite unconnected from my artistic praxis enabled me to wander for a time through an environment that for me was unknown. Where I needed to scrutinize with exactitude the whole landscape from very specific places, and obviously, gazes, images and thoughts are left from all this. Later on, I began to mentally link these constructions that had inspired mystery in me and which I'd seen distributed across the country, with the refuges where artists unfurl their soliloquy. Hence the reference to Jackson Pollock and his wood cabin separated from the house, where he shut himself in to paint, far from the world and from himself. But all that work I was doing during the first half of the 90s came to an end. It is at precisely that moment when the most important change in my work occurs, a shift from the materiality of paint to an absence of gesture, a sort of suspended time of seemingly anonymous manufacture.

It was years later when I decided my objective was to confront this relationship between thought and space, between landscape and painting, within this metaphor of the threshold. I like this point where it's not clear if the painting is the landscape or the landscape is the painting. And this way of painting as if constructing the hut, brings me extraordinary knowledge and understanding.

The suspension of time, a necessary requirement for your work that is simultaneously constituted out of the process of construction of rural architecture, and the elaboration of a painting. This contemplation, on the other hand, also demands a predisposition to lose oneself in the instant, just as the stone hut, understood as a refuge for the soul, invites the individual to become aware of the passing of time. A form of evasion? Just when it seems our time is throwing us into an unforgivable annihilation, when this notion of the experience of time seems to enter into dispute with the cult of immediacy, your work rebels and suggests a new relationship with space-time coordinates.

I have nothing against immediacy, it forms part of the experience of time. Today undoubtedly, immediacy allows us to understand better the suspended time I'm talking about. I personally believe that immediacy (the true aim of developed Western society) forms an inevitable part of our temperament: we want to have, and know, everything right this instant! The frustration of this impossibility offers us a residual margin for observation, and this is a huge source of inspiration. Everything is found around the margins of this ever so fine line along which we travel.

The drawings and large format paintings, contemplated in this exhibition, are tinged with a mysterious patina that situates us halfway between painting and photography. It's a constant in your work to establish this game of gazes that creates a tension of opposites: nature-artifice, absence-presence, real-imaginary...

What interests me about an image is everything that isn't actually present: the contradiction between what we see and what is actually there. I'm interested in conflicts of perception. As I mentioned earlier, the journey is a tentative one and this process of trial and error provokes



tensions that are, ultimately, the driving force behind my work. I'm not concerned with whether the images pertain to a world related to reality or a world closer to abstraction. I prefer to maintain myself closer to a leap in the dark, perceiving what is articulated by experimenting with things that are quite simply happening right in front of one's nose.

You situate yourself in this privileged threshold that enables you to glimpse everything that often escapes our field of vision, impossibilities arising from the blindness of the gaze. From this viewpoint, the painter, as Lyotard writes, makes us see something that can't be seen. Do you want us to become aware of absence?

The way you've formulated the question I find myself obliged to start by saying that I don't believe the painter or artist is capable of interfering with the spectator's consciousness, nor do I believe

they should. I believe the experience of painting is a personal and intimate question, a situation as you rightly suggest that is a sort of threshold from where things can be marked out in the need to understand. I carry on creating simply out of personal necessity. I have always thought art is a sort of system of communication but now I've realised it's not the case. The traces artists leave behind, I think, are undoubtedly more relevant after the event, in the future... It's clear that I say this under the supposition that something (some trace) has been left and/or has been there at some point.

Returning however to the question, I endeavour, for myself, to become aware of a certain state of absence, of emptiness, of no-place. This perhaps explains my fascination for these sorts of constructions that I imagine as a refuge for anchorites.

During the lengthy, careful gestation process of these works you document through notes, drawings, and photographs, the singularity of these houses. You also explained to me that each and every one of these constructions maintains the same method of construction, one that stretches across different countries of the Mediterranean, over centuries. One which lets you subject them, once again, to a process of unmasking, that lets you capture the primordial essence, linking with all your previous work.

Observing and annotating everything we see, that can arise through chance or from something we've never stopped long enough to look at, in some way you end up stripping things down out of the need to make an interpretation.

At a certain point in one's work, it dawns on you which threads are intertwined, and which aren't, in everything that has gone on during these years of process. For a while now I've found myself in this position. I have to say it's a very intense moment because I'm tying all these threads together and I have the feeling of being able to walk in a much more conscious manner.

Conceived as an itinerant show that will unfold in different centres across Catalonia and understood as a work in progress in that, as you advance, new pathways of knowledge open up, with the incorporation of other voices, the exhibition layout in Tinglado 2 of the Port de Tarragona evidenced a formal evolution towards abstraction that allows you to situate yourself in the "Thresholds to a fixed point in a world that turns".

It's a process, that of the last few years, that began in a fairly simple and descriptive manner. I believed something revolved around these images I conserved in my mind and I found myself obliged to resolve the mystery. And more than ever, I wasn't clear where this would all lead, so I decided simply to walk around, look and photograph the stone huts, and then back in the studio, with surgical precision, draw them, purely as a form of documentation. For me, this slow process of making, sitting in a chair for weeks on end and elaborating methodical drawings, that mark the passing of time, enables me to enter into a certain feeling of interior emptiness, where in a very physical manner all the parallel questions, and everything that configures the reality we don't see, appear to me.

In fact, for me this is all an excuse to cast my eyes on a specific place, in order to begin to generate new expectations in my own path. This is why, as I've sometimes mentioned to you, far from being resolved or completed before the first exhibition, this project has maintained a state of permanent uncertainty, one that was initially problematic but which over time has come to be its *raison d'être*. The lack of concreteness allows me to walk along the frontier, in the middle, through a sort of no-man's land, between the objectives of the painting. And I'm excited in this case to see the way the interferences of the spectators are articulated by this process of unveiling certain images; images that correspond solely to a personal experience.