

TEXT FOR THE AUDIO GUIDE: “JUAN USLÉ. EYE AND LANDSCAPE”

INTRODUCTION

Founded in May 2014, the Fundació Per Amor a l'Art is a private, family-run foundation that works across three areas—art, social work and research—at Bombas Gens de València, a remodelled former factory, through which the foundation also presents its artistic activity. Work related to the social integration of minors at risk of social exclusion and support for people with acquired brain injury is coordinated by its Social Department. Moreover, through the Wilson Team, the foundation promotes research and dissemination of rare diseases, in particular Wilson's disease.

The mission of Fundació Per Amor a l'Art is to promote and raise awareness of each one of the areas in which it is engaged, thus contributing to the creation of a better environment for all.

“Eye and Landscape” is a solo exhibition dedicated to the artist Juan Uslé. Curated by Nuria Enguita and Vicent Todolí, a consultant for the Per Amor a l'Art collection, the display offers a journey through the work of this international artist spanning the mid-1980s to the present day.

Juan Uslé was born in Santander in 1954. His childhood, bound to the Spanish socio-political context of the time, was heavily marked by a dramatic event: due to sunstroke he was forced to remain in his room for several days in the dark and in silence. A key part of his early years was also film: a language through which he learnt to see images and to analyse them formally. Cinema and the dramatic nature of his confinement are elements that the artist nurtures in a body of work underscored by a sense of visual calm.

In the 1970s Uslé studied at the San Carlos Advanced School of Fine Arts in Valencia, where his appreciation of abstraction began. By then, the artist was already integrating stylistic and thematic references into his work, such as the figure of Captain Nemo, to whom he dedicates various works in this exhibition and who is nothing more than a metaphor for how the artist understands painting. For Uslé, pictorial practice is akin to a journey in which the painting is the sole objective.

After completing his studies, based between Saro (Cantabria), New York and, more recently, Benissa (Alicante), Uslé embarked on his personal journey through painting, gradually eschewing figurative references. From the outset, Uslé places the eye, memory and dreams—in short, the subject and their gaze—at the centre of his work: the subjective nature of the gaze, which invariably determines our perception of the world, is made evident. Throughout his career, his landscapes present themselves as more personal, more private and more subjective pieces: landscapes that merge with other specific, fictitious and evoked places.

The exhibition begins with works by the artist from the second half of the 1980s—a period in which he began to explore the relationship between the gaze, landscape and memory—before examining works from the 1990s, when the lyrical abstraction that would characterise his painting during the 2000s—the focus of Gallery 4 of Bombas Gens Centre d’Art—began to take shape.

GALLERY 3

The exhibition “Eye and Landscape” begins in Gallery 3 of Bombas Gens Centre d’Art with a collection of paintings from the second half of the 1980s in which the tension between the landscape and its abstraction can be observed, anticipating the artist’s subsequent pictorial language.

Although certain figurative forms can still be recognised in some of the pieces, after travelling to New York in 1987, the artist began to distance himself yet more from representations of reality. Uslé manages to achieve almost complete erasure of images and memory in several pieces concealing numerous painted layers beneath various black tones, suggesting that something palpitates behind the darkness. Gradually, the artist would revert to use of light and colour in abstract colour field painting.

On the central table a collection of watercolours are displayed. In them, the artist explores the relationship between the world and the eye that sees (or how reality is forever filtered through the subjective gaze of each human being). Each landscape originates from an eye, inside which a horizon is drawn—a meeting place for the outside world and the inner world.

On the wall that divides the width of this gallery we see *The Book of Landscapes* (1988): a series made using an accounting notebook that Uslé found on the streets of New York. The

notebook served as a framework for the development of quick and intuitive exercises. The idea of landscape, travel and water is a constant here.

In the next room, continuing into Gallery 3, a collection of works from the 1990s are displayed. The landscapes that he alludes to in his paintings gradually disappear, or perhaps they make reference to the urban fabric of New York City or those of his own memory. The paintings are characterised by gestural repetition in which the brush's rhythm is clearly distinguished, the compositions becoming notably more dynamic. During this period, the artist sought to explore singularity, creating works that were always different from previous ones, based on the idea of *Nemasté* (a Nepalese greeting that recognises the other person's individuality).

GALLERY 4

In Gallery 4 we see a collection of pieces from the series *Soñé que revelabas* (I Dreamt that You Revealed), which Juan Uslé began in 1997 and is still in progress today. The paintings selected for this display date from the second decade of the 2000s and also include several pieces created especially for this exhibition.

In this body of work, artistic consolidation of previous chapters in the artist's career can be appreciated, combining the visual calm and expansion of painting in the 1980s with the dynamic, gestural compositions of the 1990s.

The artist's intention in this series is invariably to revisit a previous piece from the same collection of works, determining, at once, its impossibility. On the surface, the artist depicts—in the form of pictorial writing or bodily landscape—a type of self-portrait. The pieces are created based on horizontal strips formed from a succession of vertical brushstrokes, which are methodically repeated, determined by the heartbeat, breathing and isolation of the artist himself. Painted in solitude, silence and semi-darkness, they are a record of a life lived, of a mental and emotional landscape.

The works selected for this display are also linked by the fact that their titles feature the names of different rivers. Water flows through channels much like life, traversing different landscapes at every turn, moving forward at all times without stopping.

In the centre of the room we see a selection of works from the series *Notes on SQR* (2011–2020), a project that the artist made alongside that displayed on the walls, in which horizontality, brushstrokes, colour field, the horizon and rhythm take centre stage.

To complement the exhibition, a catalogue has been produced featuring all the artist's exhibited works together with several more from the same period. For the publication, John Yau and Mónica Carballas have also written two texts that nourish the artist's pieces with their rich interpretations.

To purchase a copy of the catalogue or to get more information, please speak to a gallery invigilator or the reception staff.

Many thanks for your visit.