

Manolo Quejido
Immeasurable Distance



MANOLO QUEJIDO
Painting [La pintura], 2002
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 180 cm
Private Collection
© Manolo Quejido, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022

DATES: October 21, 2022 – May 16, 2023

LOCATION: Palacio de Velázquez. Retiro Park (Madrid)

ORGANIZATION: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

CURATORSHIP: Beatriz Velázquez

Immeasurable Distance is an exhibition organized by Museo Reina Sofía, devoted to the work of Spanish artist Manolo Quejido (b. Seville, 1946), whose career started in 1964. Quejido began with experiments in Expressionism, Pop Art, and geometric experimentation, before turning definitely to painting in 1974.

In the threshold to the 1980s Quejido produced *radiant* paintings, taking as a pretext any minute incidents in quotidian life, while also looking at the entire tradition of Western painting—as particularly understood by Quejido’s hand. After these paintings, Quejido would study, during the 1980s, and across different series, the singularities in the spaces which are possible in any pictorial representation, as well as the peculiar distances that these spaces—in the surface of the canvas— can host.

From 1993 onwards Quejido’s art will also be a response to what he describes as “a state of general mediation”. Noting the overwhelming empire of consumption—both material and image consumption—, that characterizes the last decades of the XXth century, Quejido used enlarged views of commercial labels and sales announcements. He also used newspapers as the support for his paintings and press images as motifs, articulating the artists’ disgust and rejection. These works point to the “security distance” that the media place between us and the news.

Furthermore, the show includes Quejido’s continued reflections on *painting* and *thinking*—these are reflections that have endured since 1974. For Quejido, the action of painting does not simply represent a particular thought; indeed, thoughts are produced in the act of painting. In this process, according to Quejido, the pair *to paint / to think* does also always go hand in hand with a third term: *to sense* (or to feel).

Overall, the nearly one hundred works displayed at *Immeasurable Distance* are the occasion to discover Quejido’s trajectory, and to realize the artists’ radical and critical approach and the seriousness and hindsight of his investigations on painting’s plastic possibilities.

Researching on painting



MANOLO QUEJIDO
Mirror 8 [Espejo 8], 1984
Oil on canvas
204 x 218 cm
Banco Sabadell Collection
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The show starts at the central area of Palacio de Velázquez, with three different large-scale series of works made in three different decades. The series *Reflejos* [Mirror Images] is represented by *Espejo 8* [Mirror 8] (1984) and *Espejo 11* [Mirror 11] (1985). Visitors will also find here three works from the series *Tabique* [Partition Wall], dated 1990-91. In the *tabiques* Manolo Quejido studies how, in one given painting, depth and absolute flatness can concur. The *tabiques* are also a reflection on Diego de Velázquez, a reference for Quejido in his entire career.

In the central area the visitor can delve into works from the series *Moebius Q-vista* [A Cubist Möbius View], another instance of Quejido's thoughts on how space can be accommodated into a painting. *Moebius Q-vista* dates from 2003-2005, and takes the idea of the Möbius band, a surface with only one side and one only boundary curve, as described by German mathematicians August Ferdinand Möbius and Johann Benedict Listing in 1858. The Cubist Möbius were made after the *tabiques* and the *mirror images*, and it is noteworthy how Quejido, again, will tackle the mystery of that cubical capacity that is held within the flat surface of a painting.

The left side of the Palacio features works from the early 1980s, as *Maquinando* [Machinist, 1979], which are painterly and dynamically colorful. At this point, the artist was closely following the trail of the avant-gardes. Especially in examples as *PF* (1979-80) and *IP* (1980), their reduced perspective and flatness point to what will be an enduring preoccupation for Quejido. In fact, the *tabiques* of 1990-91 would later already use some elements that Quejido had made available way before.

Three slightly earlier works are shown in the Palacio's right towered space: *Ele* [Bravo, 1978], *Subevida* [Here Your Drink, 1977] or *Sin palabras* [Without Words, 1977]. The latter meant Quejido's dive into large-format canvas painting, and it speaks of an inadequacy between the world, things, and images. *Sin palabras* is a diptych where Quejido, playing with space, depicts night and day as walking figures who are about to bump into each other. If the moment of transit between day and night (or night and day) can be ascribed to both day or night, at the same time it is an instant which is distinct from the two, a unique instant for which in the Spanish language does not avail of one only word (the Spanish language does, indeed, have separate terms for the moment of twilight and the moment of dawn). *Sin palabra* is therefore a work displaying the difficulties of language to name things or events. Similarly, the incompatible nature of words and things is made evident in *Matilde disimula un pensamiento* [Matilde Dissimulates a Thought, 1974]. A painting that would open Quejido's lifelong concern on the relation between painting and thought.



MANOLO QUEJIDO
Without Words [Sin palabras], 1977
Acrylic on canvas
Dyptic, 270 x 300 cm
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Madrid
© Manolo Quejido, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022

History of art is important and recurrent in Quejido's work, as for example in the series of *30 bombillas* [30 Light Bulbs, 2020] and the *Pensamientos negros* [Black Thoughts, 2010]. Each of the light bulbs and pansy flowers we can see in this installation represents the style of a painter—to name a few, Piero della Francesca, Velázquez, Ingres, Goya, Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Warhol or Bacon—. Quejido arranges this bunch of painters in a spatial diagram which he orients according to the history of painting. The diagram, at the same time, serves as a system to determine all the possibilities of painting.

We find the same scheme in *Diamante* [Diamond, 1992], where the system of painters is indeed a map for painting, while shown—within the work—as a painting. The title, *diamond*, refers to the select group of 10 painters here included, as if it were a sort of premium digest of the history of Western painting. But again, *diamond* pictures a painting inscribed within cubic camera: Quejido keeps musing about the simultaneous flatness and three-dimensionality of painting.

At the Palace’s left side, the visitor can find more works about painting. At *La pintura* [Painting, 2022], we see a painter working on a painting of a model. This work is called *La pintura* because it figures both “a painted painting” and “a painting painting”. In fact, the Spanish word for the verb *to paint* merges the action of painting and its immediate effect, the painted canvas. These two—the action and the effect—are immediately simultaneous. Related to the show’s title, it is perhaps this simultaneity between the work and its object which Manolo Quejido calls “a distance with no measures”, an immeasurable distance: a distance that is minimal, in fact an indistinction between the painting subject and his/her object.

The action of painting and its mysteries are also studied in works such as *Los pintores* [The Painters, 2015], started in the 1990s, as well as in the successive versions of *Nacer pintor* [To Be Born a Painter], a series also started in the 1990s and shown here in its 2006 version. In *Nacer pintor* Quejido goes back to his motifs of the 1980s and places them in order, as a kind of comic-like sequence that suggests the story of a child growing up to become a painter. This work refers, too, to that “painting birth” that happens every time a painting is painting.

Social commentary

The right side of the Palace shows another aspect of Quejido’s work. Since 1993 the artist used the surface quality of paintings to declare a disapproval to the world’s situation, what he calls “the generalized mediation”.

His reaction would have different sides. For instance, Manolo Quejido would turn once more toward Velázquez, in his *VerazQes* [2005, the version here shown]. The *VerazQes* are Quejido’s renderings of Velázquez’ *La fragua de Vulcano* [Vulcan’s Forge], *Las hilanderas* [The Spinners] and *Las Meninas*. With them, Quejido offers an allegory of the army, the Crown, and banking, institutions whose rule gets disguised in the fuss of the generalized mediation.



MANOLO QUEJIDO
Unfulfilled [Sin consumir], 1997-1999
Acrylic on aluminium
200 x 600 cm
Junta de Andalucía, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo Collection
© Manolo Quejido, VEGAP, Madrid, 2022

Sin consumir [Unfulfilled, 1997-1999] makes yet another reply to mediation, and specifically to consumption. The work is monumental in size, a kind of frieze billboard boasting all sorts of commodities. It evokes the excess in the sea of consumption and sales, including a flood of price labels surrounding the promised goods.

Another series, *Sin nombre* [Nameless], works on press images, accessory as they are to their pieces of news, but acting as a membrane between the reader and the pains of others. The *Sin nombre* unveil situations of unrest [*Nameless no. 84 – Psychiatric Hospital*, 1998], and account for the violence in the fluctuations and rule of the stock market [*Nameless no. 31*, 1997].

Quejido will find an exit to the oppressive mediated statu quo in a much later series, *Por CubAndo* [2009-10]. Lightness, instead of mediation, is Quejido's proposal as stated by *Por CubAndo*: a lightness in the formula to laugh/to play/to dance that the artist takes from Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze.

The towers in this right side of Palacio de Velázquez include very early works by Quejido. For instance, there are the *Cartulinas* [cardboards], pictorial essays formatted into the standard size of cardboards (100 x 70 cm). In the end Quejido's *cardboards* would count by the hundreds, their images encompassing most miscellaneous subjects: items, characters, portrayed people, animals, ideas, places. In this space we also find works such as *Trideliriums*, *Siluetas* [Silhouettes] and *Secuencias* [Sequences], from the range of dates 1969 to 1974. They all result from the reduction, to only black and white, of earlier works that followed the three components in Quejido's initial work —Expressionism, Pop, and Geometrical work.

Catalogue

An illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition, including essays by the curator of the show, Beatriz Velázquez, and by authors Pablo Allepuz and Isidro Herrera.

With the collaboration of:



For further information:

PRESS OFFICE

MUSEO REINA SOFÍA

internacionalprensa@museoreinasofia.es

(+34) 91 774 10 05 / 10 11

www.museoreinasofia.es/prensa

