



La sombra de la piedra roja

Juan Tessi mutates.

He first came to prominence with small-scale photorealist paintings depicting an agonizing, protracted queer adolescence—described as “poised between fashion photography and courtly portraiture”—which placed him on the map of Argentine visual art in 2005. He later surprised audiences with a decisive turn toward experimental abstraction, generating works from the audio track of a makeup tutorial during his time at the Kuitca Fellowship (2010–11). This was followed by a sustained inquiry into the materiality of painting, in which its “skin” (the paint itself) was left precariously suspended from the rigid support of an acrylic sheet laid over canvas. He subsequently incorporated ceramics both within and beyond the pictorial field, and more recently has explored the tension between primed zones, raw canvas, and the latent presence of the body and its drives.

Those who have followed Tessi’s trajectory will recognize how his persistent engagement with “the problem of painting” propels a state of continual transformation, positioning him as one of the most sophisticated and probing painters of his generation in Argentina.

In his most recent work, Tessi relinquishes the precision of line and boundary—as well as the subtle, mischievous inflection that marked his immediately preceding phase—in favor of a mode of painting freed from programmatic intent. The exhibition’s curator, Sonia Becce, observes: “His painterly eye enters into matter itself until vision blurs and magnified fragments appear; it is there that he reaches the essence of what he seeks to paint. But one might also imagine that

his gaze aspires to a cosmic scale, wandering among galaxies with the aid of some instrument.” Tessi responds: “I like to think that the mineral base of color brings me closer to cosmic dust.” He notes, too, that he aimed to complete each work before any compositional ‘punchline’ or governing rule could take hold. These paintings remain deliberately open-ended, conveying a sense of uncertainty as to their ultimate destination.

Unintentionally, they resonate with the present moment—with the conditions under which we are living.

In a gesture that begins to articulate a more comprehensive view of Tessi’s practice, the curator has included several very early works from 1993, produced while he was a student attending an intensive art seminar at Yale University.

It is clear that the universe of Juan Tessi was already in formation. Reflecting on his process and this exhibition, the artist adds: “When I paint, all the conversations that run through my head converge—readings, experiences, memories, opinions, songs, even a grocery list. Thoughts that are interrupted, abandoned, linked, layered. It is across these multiple registers that I ‘compose’ the work—from intuition, candor, and banality. In these paintings, I’m allowing myself the freedom to sustain an increasingly syncopated, strange, and uncomfortable conversation—the opposite of an over-adapted exchange.”