

# Gil Heitor Cortesão

## Lost Summer

June 5–July 26, 2014

### FREE TIME

An Attempt at an Approach to the Eschatological Dimension  
of Gil Heitor Cortesão's Painting

Between 1964 and 1982 David Hockney produced a series of works that had the swimming pool as their unifying element, with this structure being here understood as a symbol of a lifestyle associated to an image of both social and material success. Through continuous representation of this type of architectural elements Hockney sought to resolve issues related not only with the way of depicting the surface and movement of water, but also with the attempt to overcome the abstraction/figuration dichotomy on the same plane. That set of works has its origin in California, Hockney's favourite destination after he finished his course at the London Royal College of Art in 1962. It is in that geographical area of the American West that private swimming pools started to proliferate, being places where a great many fantasies are carried out, generally associated to a society of consumption and excess.

The swimming pool can also be associated to violent death, with an example of this being the end of *Gatsby*, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel: "There was a faint, barely perceptible movement of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way towards the drain at the other. With little ripples that were hardly the shadows of waves, the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool. A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of a transit, a thin red circle in the water." In art this motif, that of death in a swimming pool, enabled Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset to recently create the installation *Death of a Collector* (2009).

There is one of Hockney's painting that is of particular interest for an approach to the current exhibition by Gil Heitor Cortesão, *Lost Summer*. This is *A Bigger Splash* (1967), a work in which one can observe the exact moment in which someone or something has just dived into the water, with the surface showing the water rising up into the air after this action. The representation obtained by Hockney is sufficiently enigmatic to shift the centre of attention from that which would be the mere representing of a typically Californian scene – a single-storey house, with two palm trees, a director's chair and a swimming pool – to a work from which it is possible to reflect about the suspending of a moment through painting. It is Hockney himself who talks about the time spent – two weeks – painting something of which the real time duration was no more than two seconds, and also mentioning the pleasure he put into that meticulous task, that of representing a "splash" appropriated from an advertising picture of the time.

Gil Heitor Cortesão has also been interested in swimming pools for a long time – in the case of his works, at least since 2002 – as well as houses and interiors, both public and private. One

can also state that the situations represented in his works tend towards the liquid state; that is, it is as if reality is subjugated to the painting itself and the latter ended up by contaminating it until its irremediable corrosion. Due to all this it perhaps may not be an exaggeration to state that this is a work about the end of the times, and is therefore eschatological. The way he applies the paint on the surface of each work – allowing it to run, using it to form stains, or also using it to create areas of great chromatic turbulence – reinforces the idea that the image represented is about to disappear, such is the feeling of dizziness transmitted by this aqueous dimension that can be seen in almost all of Gil Heitor Cortesão's creations.

Gil Heitor Cortesão's choice not to paint on canvas, wood or any other surface more usually chosen by the artists who work in the same medium, but rather to prefer to use acrylic, a transparent material, also allows him to reinforce the liquid dimension that emerges from his works. That which the spectator sees is almost always an image painted from behind the acrylic: the outer part, that which is closest to the observer, has never been touched by the paint, and this latter, under normal circumstances, will never be touched by the public, as it is protected by that membrane that is simultaneously transparent and opaque, front and back, beginning and end of each instant represented there. Francis Bacon's idea to place glass in front of his paintings, a manner of simultaneously distancing the spectator from and bringing them close to the work, may here be called up, as, in the case of Gil Heitor Cortesão, his option for acrylic seems to have more to do with his desire to question the status of the image itself and its intention to set itself up as absolute truth – hence the fact that his representations are on the edge of decomposition, as if it were no longer possible to extract anything else from them other than the sight of their implosion.

*Lost Summer* is an exhibition made up of five works of considerable sizes, with one of them being a triptych. What unites them is the presence of a swimming pool or of situations associated to them. However, unlike David Hockney, who painted them as symbols of a relaxed life associated to certain luxuries, Gil Heitor Cortesão instead shows us the public, massed space that was also starting to appear in the western world at that time – the images he appropriates are taken from magazines from the middle of the last century, no doubt published after World War II. These works deal with occupying “free time”, but the representations that are now visible bear something terrifying: as figurations of a past that never became ours, if it ever even belonged to anyone, the multiple unfoldings of the works exhibited above all reveal the immense emptiness of consumer society: “In a system in which full employment has in itself become an ideal, free time vaguely forms a continuation of work”, correctly wrote Theodor W. Adorno in his essay *Free Time*.

Gil Heitor Cortesão's subject is also the history of painting, referring directly to it in *Déjeuner sous l'herbe*, an evocation of Édouard Manet, which invites us to go directly towards nature and enjoy it with no restraints, and in other cases his painting pays subtle and perhaps involuntary homage to other authors, such as the cases of Seurat, Bacon, Klein and Polke. Seen in the light of the present, *Lost Summer*, a title which in itself contains Proustian resonances, brings out an ill-feeling that is not only due to the boredom associated to the “free time” of a recent past, but also to that of the emptiness felt after the 11th of September 2001. All the works on show at the exhibition carry that corrosion, that bipolarity, that continuous fall that from then on continues to inhabit us. An enormous splash that comes to us from all sides, like a great mass of ice that gradually approaches our lost Summers at the poolside looking at each other.

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