

# Gil Heitor Cortesão

## Late Night Shopping

January 19—March 4, 2017

### Lullaby

Does a painter have an obligation to express something through their works? The Irish writer Samuel Beckett tried out an attempt at an answer in one of the famous dialogues with Georges Duthuit, published in 1949 in the aftermath of World War II, that traumatic event that later generations have tried to make us forget, particularly through a continuous appeal to consumerism. In Beckett's opinion, the categorical imperative of creating would have thus to be removed from the plane of the doable with repugnance, as this would be the only way of not being "tired of their insignificant feats, tired of pretending to be capable, of being able, of doing the same thing a little better, of going a little further along a sad road."

Beckett then proposed a path on which one could express that there was nothing left to express, "nothing to express, no power to express, no desire to express, along with the obligation to express." What exactly is that duty, then, if everything seems to be pushing the possibility to create off the road? After the Baudelairean tedium, after the Deleuzean weariness, the artist's task of mourning seems also to have come to the end. Today it is more plausible for the pessimism of a Thomas Ligotti to be accepted, or the theories of Ray Brassier, for whom there exists a reality that is independent of our minds. And that, perhaps, our negotiation with the world should take this premise into consideration.

Just has been happening systematically in his work, this exhibition by Gil Heitor Cortesão constructs a sort of fiction with scientific outlines around a time that is out of time, for the lack of better words to describe what takes place in his paintings. One might also say timeless, not exactly about these works, but rather in that attempt to describe the quality inherent to these apparitions materialized in colours on acrylic surfaces. These are images of an extinction – of the species, of all species, of the world, of the universe – that are fixed on our retinas. They might come from the past, just as they seem, if it were possible to define, grab and fix these states of existence. This is, however, a task facing failure.

There is a vortex that emerges from a wall and threatens to suck everything into it. There is a rug in the same painting, *La Vague*, that appears to be transforming into a swamp. There is also a difference of planes: one of the sides of the painting appears to be closer to us than the other, thus adding more movement to something by definition static. A jet of white painting gives the idea of wanting to assure us that we are on safe ground: a work of art is always a reality set apart from a world in decomposition. Is it really like that? Is there also the possibility of us grabbing this last resort? Gil Heitor Cortesão places us on the outsider, not only as spectators, but also in our dimension as consumers, as owners, as the possessor of a truth. Everything takes place in front of our eyes, but in fact what we are seeing is out of our reach, fleeing from

us, just like in this apparently vandalized work, the objects – sculptures, paintings, furniture – are the only survivors.

One takes a look around and everything confirms that we are alone, facing something that we are not yet able to identify. It is a solitude that runs through the centuries. When placed in front of these nocturnal displays, which on the one hand appear to be liquefying and on the other hand coagulating, we simultaneously face up to dreams and nightmares. Nature, the outside, is separated, separates us, from that comfort of the home, of luxury, of a welcoming lobby. We recall, as an antecedent, Edward Hopper's painting *Seven A.M.* (1948): the desolate shop front, the shop still closed, in the early hours of the morning, contrasts with the green of the landscape that emerges on the left of the depiction. This work, described by the artist's wife as the façade of a “blind pig”, a nightclub where illegal gambling takes place, describes the existential, alienated void of the postwar period.

The liquid state befits Gil Heitor Cortesão's painting. His paintings seem to come apart faced with our impotence to make this process stop. These works, now inhabited by rust, by must and by stains, grow old with us. They announce a danger and describe it line by line, dot by dot, drawing out a sort of post-apocalyptic vision: the triptych “The Blinds” seems to capture that final moment of an all-blinding light, something close to a nuclear explosion or a meteorite crashing into our planet. The works also look like they have been burnt or are in the initial stage of combustion. And although they provide no answer to the question at the beginning of this text, they try to tell us that well-being, that time of all late, wakeful purchases, may suddenly turn into a terror movie. Perhaps the lyrics to *Lullaby*, by Scott Walker, may help to finish this brief meditation: “The most intimate / personal choices / and requests / central to your / personal dignity / will be sung.”

It is always a question of personal dignity. Painting.

Óscar Faria