

Now More Is Less

Isabel Tejada Martín

From macro to micro. In this project Guillermo Mora practises a kind of painting which, in theory, has much grander ambitions. This Madrid-based painter prepares large surfaces of around 20 kilos of paint—for the final work discussed here a total of 250 kilos was used—and, once dried, folds them up like sheets until they are compressed and the paint is conquered, reduced to its minimal material expression. The containment process, during which Mora physically wrestles with the material, is supposedly finished once the rubber bands that help constrain the package are in place, bonds that facilitate his efforts to keep the bulky mass in that folded-up state and prevent it from bouncing back to its original shape. The painting, visibly transformed into volume, thus dispenses with the stretcher as its traditional container and with the canvas or panel as its support. The only support is the paint itself. These pieces are malleable, seemingly fragile and short-lived, but we must not forget that they are plastic. They would be able to survive potential cataclysms by inhabiting dystopian settings.

This support-less painting is therefore transmuted into sculpture... but a sculpture that adopts the form of a bundle. The jumble we see comes from the imagery typically associated with bales. “Our forms of storage force the object to submit to a logical, practical system,” but Guillermo Mora wonders, “What would happen if these systems were applied to the pictorial object?” In this stacking process, the pieces reject the logical structure that has proven so effective with the parallelepiped brick shape, creating tensions with the space that have nothing to do with the author’s decisions. They respond only to the passage of time and the variations in temperature and humidity levels, causing the preventive conservation devices—impertinent in this case—to burst at the seams. Apparently, museums and art centres did not learn the lesson of the 1970s; clinging to inertia, they still believe that what enters their doors is a finished work of art rather than a project whose

production process includes its transformations and perhaps even its death. It seems that there is no room for chance in these conservation protocols, which attempt to minimise its potential action or, better yet, thwart it altogether. As with Robert Morris's felt pieces, the material must adapt to the space... but in this case time also comes into play.

This experience with artwork that is intrinsically alive and changing may have begun at Guillermo Mora's solo show at El Campello, with *Tú la llevas [You've Got It]* (2009), where small, apparently minimalising pieces featured massive amounts of wet oil paint protected by a thin layer of transparent plastic. The oils were still runny and in motion, and they would still be moving today if the work hadn't cracked and dried out. At Matadero, the precarious structure made out of discarded studio elements, *Subir para bajar [Going up to Come Down]* (2011), succumbed to the law of gravity, collapsing in a fall that Mora did not see as a failure but as an intrinsic part of the work. These errors in calculation or accidents seem to open up new paths: "I'm not interested in the piece as such but in its organic process," the artist freely admits. In fact, he often recycles his pieces even after they have been exhibited, using parts of old works to assemble new ones as if his mission was to create a never-ending Frankenstein.

The formulas of presentation of these works also offer themselves as a counterstrategy against conventional ways of consuming art, particularly against the custom of displaying paintings frontally and almost always hung at mid-height. When placed in a corner on the floor, they look like abandoned objects and may even pass unnoticed. For example, when a version of this work was exhibited in Rome, each of these bundles was huddled like a bit of spatial detritus opposite an immense wall. "No one sees them, and I like that," commented Guillermo Mora. They aren't put on pedestals or given artistic labels, although the context itself serves to identify them.

There is something secretive about these bales, which lurk at the heart of every painting: built up in layers, each coat of paint covers the ones beneath, and this—to use a famous example—ultimately betrays the presence of typical Velazquezian pentimenti. But the secret that Guillermo Mora's works guard so solidly is far less mysterious: paint, and nothing but paint.