

DAVID SALLE

Inspired by True-Life Events

CAC MÁLAGA, CENTRO DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO DE MÁLAGA

16 SEPTIEMBRE / 4 DICIEMBRE 2016 • 16 SEPTEMBER / 4 DECEMBER 2016

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FRANK O'HARA (b. Baltimore, 1926) wrote a poem entitled "Why I Am Not a Painter" in 1957, about the relations between poetry and painting. In it, he mentions the Abstract Expressionist Mike Goldberg (New York, 1924-2007) and describes his visits to the painter's studio. He explains how, as Goldberg works on a painting, he starts out with sardines and keeps going until they disappear, and only a few letters of the word are left. O'Hara decides to write a poem about orange; he writes verse after verse about what orange suggests to him, finishes the poem and finds that he never once used the word "orange". One day he stops by a gallery and sees his friend's painting, called *SARDINES*.

David Salle eludes the confines of classification: sometimes his work is filled with abstract nuances, at other times it is intensely figurative, and at yet others he becomes a comic-book illustrator. The aim of his art is to elicit emotions, seeking immediate transcendence in a fragmented material world.

Within the pictorial debate, we might say that Salle is, for the most part, a classical postmodern: classical in his passionate love of order, and post-modern because he constantly questions centralised, totalising, hierarchical and – as they are for him – closed systems. The important thing is that, rather than destroying these systems, he calls them into question, for his work is ultimately about selection and interruption. He listens, observes, feels and records this eccentric, centre-less, utterly chaotic world. He recognises humanity's imperious need to create order, while also pointing out that the orders we create are just that: conceptual manmade objects, not natural or given entities.

His iconography stems from a typical American or even a typical New York experience, but this is not the essence of his work; Salle manipulates the surface of the image, and it reminds us of something. For him, iconography is only a means to an end; pictorial expression will always reign supreme. His erotically charged works depict women and sexuality while playing with their skins and gestures.

Different iconographic elements serve as a pretext for painting in different ways: sometimes realistically, other times expressively. He mixes iconographic elements to produce an abundance of pictorial variations within a single picture, thus maintaining the painting's vitality and vibrant emotion. Salle's works reveal a formidably obstinate insistence on meaning, which in turn generates different interpretations. He shows the possibilities of

narrative but never fulfils them, as the narrative does not unfold as such. He is forever assembling mixed cultural references. He appropriates the objectified images of the outside world by painting copies of them, customising them and giving them meaning. The artist has no qualms about advertising these appropriations or loans, for he champions the art of the synecdoche – the part of the whole – where history mingles with anecdotes. Like many other artists of his generation, he owes much of his rich visual vocabulary to images culled from daily life that give him inspiration.

Salle explores the intangible relationship between objects, his images floating in fragmented world of poetic simultaneity. His paintings address the melancholic feeling of loss and desire exacerbated by private conflicts, which, as in the paintings of his colleague Eric Fischl, not only play out fantasies but also express the mystical, mysterious quality of the encounter with woman, always somewhere between fascinating and darkly sinister. Salle uses the painted bodies of female models as brushes to present them as abstraction and figuration in his work.

It is interesting to compare how he used photography in his early days, when he was still a student at CalArts (California Institute of the Arts), with how he uses it now in his paintings. But one thing has been a constant in his career: in the 1970s he began using cinematographic techniques, such as montage and split-screen effects, which can still be found in his latest works.

Although he does not consider himself a theoretical person, he uses a wide range of devices: rhythm, sequence, time, scale, structure, inflection, etc. For David Salle, the key is how things come together and the freedom that union brings – the freedom to establish pictorial associations which are correct but not necessarily literal. The completely personal can never be imitated. That is why David Salle wants to live in a Frank O'Hara poem, where the creative process of painting a picture or writing a poem is as natural and essential as breathing, as living.