A garden as a painting, a painting as a garden

"Nothing is more the child of art than a garden" Sir Walter Scott

Carlos Navarrete (b. 1968, Santiago de Chile) travels around the world as a present-day explorer, who, using his own methods and variety of media, goes on expeditions and investigates such topics as identity and culture. In so doing he enters constantly into dialogue with the cities and cultures he visits. The frame through which he views the places he stays is his perspective as a traveller, using photos, paintings and ephemeral interventions.

Even when he uses several media, his work remains linked to painting, ad more especially the tradition of geometric abstraction. His photos often include a domino he has carried with him for years. He sees it as a sort of pocket or portable painting that refers to Malevich's black square, by which means he tries to position and document the order of geometry in a chaotic world. Navarrete's work is like a continuous series of actions or processes which in each presentation crystallise into a well-considered temporary composition.

Thee themes are interwoven in this exhibition: travel, mobility and gardens (Zen and other). Carlos Navarrete is essentially an abstract painter, through his installations would not immediately lead one to believe so. A period of residence at the CCA in Kitakyushu in Japan in 2000 and 2001 had a decisive influence on his development as an artist. During his months in what to him was an unusual Japanese environment, an inner process gradually occurred which ultimately had a determining effect on his further evolution. The fact is that Navarrete became fascinated by the creation of Japanese Zen gardens, a mental evolution that also occurred in the Japanese master-painters of the 15th and 16th centuries. The connection between Zen gardens and abstract painting lies deeply rooted in the tradition of Japanese painting, especially since the development of the monochrome style of painting that came from China and is practised by Zen Buddhist monks. Just like the Japanese painters, Navarrete also started to see the Zen garden as a three-dimensional version of the monochrome painting. Both the garden and the painting are abstractly ordered spaces, geometric compositions, constructions used as a means to meditation and reflection. Both painting and the creation of a garden are spiritual exercises. The Zen garden is symbolic of our artificial reality. You do not enter it physically, only visually and mentally.

However, Navarrete sees the concept of absence as the most important idea behind the Zen garden. The water you hear murmuring but do not see. The fresh air you cannot truly observe. Absence is linked to identity. The ephemeral Zen acts in the city, and also the photos and postcards, are Navarrete's "portraits in absence". They demonstrate both his presence and his absence.

The hanging Zen garden in the exhibition is a rendering of Navarrete's observations and perspective as a traveller in Ghent, where the carpet symbolises the city. The display of his travel journal full of mementos puts even greater emphasis on his experiences as a traveller. The tile with his painting of the black square is his "self-portrait in absence". Navarrete's culture, identity and art move from one place to another, but the black square remains ever-present.

He makes reference not only to the Japanese master-painters, but also to iconic figures of Western painting such as Malevich and Gerhard Richter. The visual end to the exhibition is a door behind which is a monochrome painting. It is a tribute to, and a visual, almost instructional translation of the superior concepts of Richter's abstract painting. The abstract painting which, like a window, offers a view of the landscape outside. With the carpet as an extra element, Navarrete also points out to the viewer the position he adopts: the domestic point of view. In addition, the composition of picture on the wall suggest a contemporary reference to the principle of chiaroscuro.

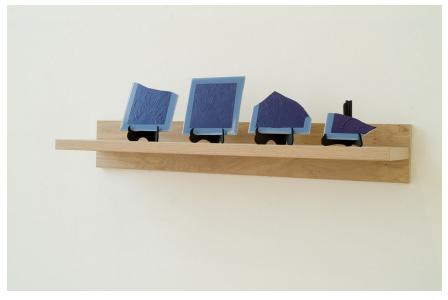
Navarrete sees art as a means of communicating on identity and culture, travel and mobility. Art is life.

Beatrijs Eemans Ghent, October 2006



Travels, mobility & gardens
2006
Four C-Print photographs
50 x 60 cm (each one)
View of the work at Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuele Kunst (City-Scan)
Ghent, Belgium





Los Andes 2006 Fragments of tiles over shelf Variable dimentions View of the work at Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuele Kunst (City-Scan) Ghent, Belgium



Ghent garden 2006 Carpet with two small Zen garden (hanging version) and two monochromes paintings
Variable dimentions
View of the work at Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuele Kunst (City-Scan)
Ghent, Belgium





Ghent garden
2006
Carpet with two small Zen garden (hanging version) and two
monochromes paintings
Variable dimentions
Details of the work at Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuele Kunst (City-Scan)
Ghent, Belgium



The artist's studio
2001-2006
Wall drawing installation (mixed media)
20 x 30 cm each one, framed
Details of the work at Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuele Kunst (City-Scan)
Ghent, Belgium



Exit
2006
Museum door with carpet and monochrome painting
Variable dimentions
View of the work at Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuele Kunst (City-Scan)
Ghent, Belgium





Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, Japanese version 2006 Portable Zen garden with diverse objects 40 x 60 x10 cm Details of the work at Copyright Bookshop Ghent, Belgium



A secret garden for Ghent 2006 Diverse objects in a Zen arrangement Variable dimentions View of the work at private home in Ghent, Belgium



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A secret garden for Ghent 2006 Diverse objects in a Zen arrangement Variable dimentions View of the work at private home in Ghent, Belgium