

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, and 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.

Three 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 dimensions

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 dimensions

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 dimensions

Details of the work at Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele 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 Actuele Kunst (City-Scan)
Ghent, Belgium



Exit

2006

Museum door with carpet and monochrome painting

Variable dimensions

View of the work at Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (City-Scan)

Ghent, Belgium



Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe, Japanese version

2006

Portable Zen garden with diverse objects

40 x 60 x 10 cm

Details of the work at Copyright Bookshop
Ghent, Belgium



A secret garden for Ghent

2006

Diverse objects in a Zen arrangement

Variable dimensions

View of the work at private home in Ghent, Belgium



A secret garden for Ghent

2006

Diverse objects in a Zen arrangement

Variable dimensions

View of the work at private home in Ghent, Belgium



A secret garden for Ghent

2006

Diverse objects in a Zen arrangement

Variable dimensions

View of the work at private home in Ghent, Belgium