

Pablo Uribe

The Coleridge Museum

Possible Notes on Ana Bidart's Work

By Martín Craciun

Pablo Uribe (Montevideo, 1962) is one of Uruguay's most prolific artists. The success of his work has transcended the local context, and it has been well exhibited in institutions both regionally and internationally. His work focuses on a current time frame, projecting universal questions regarding identity, authorship and the project of Modernity in art in the context of the South, based on conceptual reflections rooted in local art history. His formal strategies emerge from his origins in the graphic arts, extending into installation and video work.

For the first time in Argentina, Uribe is presenting a project based on a new body of work conceived especially in relation to the gallery space. The exhibition title refers to Jorge Luis Borges' essay "La flor de Coleridge" (The Coleridge Flower), published in *Otras inquisiciones* (Other Inquisitions) in 1952, which begins with a quote from Paul Valéry, "The history of Literature should not be a history of the authors and the events of their careers or the career of their works, but the History of the Spirit as a producer or consumer of literature. This history could be written without mentioning a single writer."

Uribe echoes Borges' idea that *all authors are one author* in order to deploy a body of work that questions concepts of authorship and originality, opening the imagination to other interpretations of our art's development; in this case, he does it in terms of the Rio de la Plata region.

Pablo Uribe has dedicated over a decade to working on his *Croma* (Chroma) series, involving montages of planes of color that obey a meticulous study of singular Uruguayan artworks that are chromatically decomposed, yet maintain the original format of the work being referenced. Working with art restorer Mechtild Endhardt, who scientifically reproduces the original works' colors and applies them to the canvas, achieving an absolute plane of color, Uribe arranges them in the exhibition space to compose *The Coleridge Museum*, the piece that provides the show's title. The way it is mounted suggests nods to Neoplasticism, showing spatial and chromatic relationships to order to compose a piece that signals the gallery's architecture. Each piece is identified with its nomenclature, in a unique

composition where Uribe has organized his imaginary collection of referential works of Uruguayan painting in decomposed form. *Croma* can also be summarized as a systematic study of art and its possibilities through the use of color and form in painting. It generates new works-based configurations, now in absolute terms. These works are deployed to explore the formal possibilities of abstraction as a language with universal pretensions. It is an exercise that is conceptual in nature, where Uribe strips away art's artisanal tradition to think about color, form and composition.

In his museum, Uribe refers to Samuel Taylor Coleridge (England, 1772-1834), an English poet and philosopher associated with the founding of Romanticism in England. Coleridge protagonized a singular episode in the history of Western literature: the poet was secluded on a farm in Exmoor when he experienced a physical malady while reading a passage by Samuel Purchas that obliged him to take medication with a hypnotic effect. In that state of sleep, he dreamed a series of images and words. When he awoke, he was certain he had composed, or received, a poem consisting of some three hundred verses. He recalled them with clarity and was able to transcribe them, and this passage can be found in his published work. This event is central to Borges' essay, and Uribe takes it as a link that connects with the ideas the illustrious writer postulated. For his exhibition at W-Galería, Uribe has decided to move forward with this project, and utilize the gallery's archive and its artists as raw material for this new exhibition. Accordingly, he has taken works by Cristina Schiavi, Magdalena Jitrik and Nicolás Guagnini as a source to produce new works. The works produced in Buenos Aires, by local technicians following the artist's instructions, coexist with those from *The Coleridge Museum*. It is a commentary of sorts on the current condition of the art world and its institutions.

In the *Tratteggios* series, he utilizes the same idea of chromatically decomposing works while maintaining their format and medium, but in this case, the *tratteggio* technique is used, a method for retouching or restoration that proposes a solution that manages to avoid confusion over authorship, while substituting the missing parts of an original piece. What is lacking is substituted through the technique of creating fine lines that

complete the image and color when seen from a distance, but can be distinguished by the eye up close, demonstrating that the retouching is posterior, and not done by the artist. Professional conventions dictate that the activity of a conservator or restorer can be neither creative nor imitative in relation to the artist's work. Exhibited in composition with the originals, these new works again raise questions that have to do with originality on various levels. Uribe repeats the use of a technical device to produce works with formal elegance and sobriety, to further his research into the limits of authorship and representation in art.

His *Hostesses* series (2018) presents a plaster edition of a sculpture by the Uruguayan sculptor Bernabé Michelena (Uruguay, 1888-1963). It consists of five sculptures taken from the original and arranged in the space. The work's title is also a quote, of a work by Peter Fischli (Switzerland, 1952) and David Weiss (Switzerland, 1946-2012), involving a series of plaster sculptures of an airline stewardess. The molds and copies of Michelena's sculpture were not done by Uribe himself, either, but by Javier Ribeiro, who has decided to sign the works. With the use of reproduction, Uribe erases the boundaries of authorship once again, and in this case, the reference to the original is as close as it is evident.

Uribe has added a new step to *The Coleridge Museum*; he has commissioned a version of *Hostesses* from Elba Bairon, who is among the group of artists represented by W-Galería, and is also exhibiting at the gallery at the same time that his show takes place. The sculpture by Bairon possesses the traits that are characteristic of her work. In this new development of the piece, Uribe commissions work from another artist with an already consolidated career and body of work.

Pablo Uribe also presents *Utopía* (Utopia, 2024), edition of an actual size golden ratio compass, a reproduction of the compass that Joaquín Torres García had at La Escuela del Sur / Taller Torres García in Montevideo¹. This compass can be observed hanging on the wall, present in numerous photographs of the production and educational studio for Constructive Universalism-based art and painting. The compass was utilized to compose and design large scale pieces, giving them golden ratio proportions. At the same time, on account of its size and sculptural characteristics, the instrument was exhibited in the shows of works from the Torres García Studio held in Paris and in

Rio de Janeiro in 1978, where it was unfortunately destroyed in a fire, along with seventy works and murals². This new piece, cast in a single, unjointed piece of bronze—the original was made of wood—functions as the centerpiece of the project that Uribe presents for W-Galería. It serves as a point of reference for thinking about art from the standpoint of the South, with all its contemporary detours, precedents and projections.

The Coleridge Museum explores the diverse relationships and modalities that comprise art practice in its historical and current context. It is a study of the ties between subjects and objects in the time and space of the gallery. These works are containers in which the artist incubates a form of artistic subjectivity that emanates from knowledge and research, seeking both aesthetic and political reverberations. Art can be understood as a collective construction that proposes, aside from the heroic gestures and skilled figures that have managed to transcend, that it is art itself that progressively delineates its history.

Pablo Uribe invites us to think about art as a limited group of images and forms that are arranged in an infinite series of ways and versions.

1 La Escuela del Sur was founded by the maestro Joaquín Torres García in 1942 in Montevideo.

2 www.torresgarcia.org.uy/novedad/tiempo-de-mirar-1978-2018

