

May 26 – August 20

Nicolás Franco

Grey Matter



In his exhibition *Grey Matter*, Chilean artist Nicolás Franco displays at the National Museum of Fine Arts, between May 26 and August 20, unpublished pieces that process photographs of works from the MNBA collection in order to address painting as a genre and highlight the cyclical and secular interactions present in our visual history.

The Chilean artist highlights the cyclical and secular interactions present in visual history. This way, his work thematizes concepts such as time, chance, change, creation and destruction as a way to reflect upon, within an abstract and minimalist matrix, the way in which reality and history have been and are materially processed as an image.

Over the past fifteen years, Nicolás Franco has examined various ways of unfolding contemplation and history through images. His work processes and re-edits visual objects and printed matter, driven by some archival obsession whose purpose is never evident. Several of his projects, carried out between 2008 and 2023, involve medial transfers of documentary images that, from a certain laterality, allude to recognizable cultural, geopolitical and technical processes that marked the evolution of the twentieth century.

Whether they be scientific reports on the effects of World War I or letters that house the precarious calligraphy and existence of the Jackal of Nahueltoro, these traces appear in Franco's work republished under a cold perspective, which oscillates between formalism and concept. With a specific attention to painting, his work proposes a meditation on the technical deployment that modulates, transforms, and reorganizes the visual experience, that is, an appeal to the technical history of the image which is essential when thinking about the images of history.

For *Grey Matter*, the artist has used photographs of works belonging to the MNBA collection - paintings, sculptures, ornaments, documents, press. Each matrix, meticulously recorded, has been fixed on thick aluminum panels by means of a chemical reaction produced by the contact of various types of acid with the metal. This process works as a starting point for a series of immense paintings, up to four meters wide, in which industrial processes of great complexity are combined with subtle artisanal interventions.

"The museum's collection is a world into itself. It was for me an opportunity to review our history and to face the real, what we are or were. It is a thematically open file, but at the same time delimited. It works as a fence that paradoxically opens more possibilities than it closes", explains Nicolás Franco.

The monumental scale, the precise replica of the photographic grays, the almost unnoticed color marks, the photomechanical errors, the brightness and opacities of the support and the most calculated interventions of the artist imbue the paintings with a cinematic aura. Tense and challenged by this game of inputs and outputs, of small fleeting events of form and figure produced by the unstable material, deferred and interrupted encounters with a historical and personal memory arise.

Curated by art historian Sebastián Vidal Valenzuela, the exhibition explores the museum's collection from an ambiguous and visceral point of view. Each painting that makes up *Grey Matter*, with its different intensities, transmutes this collection of images into matter to give them a new threshold of intensity, an enigmatic texture. As in almost all of Franco's works, the archive is only a starting point that functions as a vehicle to delve into the broader concerns of his work, which are related to the nature of creation and to the ability to make visible and palpable the mystery that certain images and objects contain.

"It is interesting and provocative that *Grey Matter* explores, from the exercise of pictorial materialities, referents of the history of local art, such as the works that the museum itself houses in its collections. From the particular gaze of an artist, emblematic works that are also testimonies of times and events of the past, are revisited and altered as complex formulas of that tension - in their limits between figuration and abstraction - the contemporaneity of the image and visual culture both in its status of painting, sculpture and installation", says the curator.

Along with the series of paintings, a group of sculptures that are part of the series entitled *NW* are also exhibited. Aluminum profiles arranged from floor to ceiling in the space of the room, contain inside a set of found objects, images, texts and material waste used in the production of the works. This series of works, started by Franco in 2010, constantly reappears and accompanies the central works of his projects.

The exhibition was possible thanks to the National Fund for Culture and the Arts, convocation 2022, belonging to the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage and the support of the National Museum of Fine Arts of Santiago.

Nicolas Franco (Santiago, 1973), studied at the University of Chile and De Ateliers, Amsterdam. He has been awarded numerous prizes, including TECNOPOL, Universidad Alberto Hurtado and University of Oxford (2016); The Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant, NY (2010-2001); Union Latine culture et Comunicación (2008); Nominated Prix Pictet (2015); AMA-Gasworks Scholarship, AMA Foundation (2013); De - Ateliers, Mondrian Foundation and Ministry of Culture and Science of The Netherlands (1998-2000), among others. His work has been the subject of twelve solo exhibitions in Museums and has been presented in Europe, North and South America, highlighting Tate Modern, London (2019-20); Migros Museum, Zurich (2016); MEIAC Badajoz (2010); LIMAC - Museum of Contemporary Art of Lima (2017); Museo del Barro, Asunción (2009); Blanes Museum, Montevideo (2008); Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art, Santiago (2015); National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago (2011, 2017); Museum of Visual Arts, Santiago (2011-2019); Fundación Corpartes Santiago (2013); Cromwell Place, London (2022), Centre Of Contemporary Art Znaki CZASU, Torun (2018), Sala Alcalá 31, Madrid (2020), Centro de Arte La Conservera, Murcia (2015).

His work is present in the collections of Tate Modern (London), Museum of Contemporary Art (Santiago), Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Santiago), Museum of Visual Arts (Santiago), Centre of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu (Poland), Eduardo Hochschild Collection (Lima), Il Posto (Santiago), Juan Yarur Collection (Santiago), Engel Foundation Collection (Santiago), Celia Sredni Birbragher Collection (Bogotá), Leticia and Stanislas Poniatowski Collection (Paris), AMA Foundation (Santiago), Visual Arts Foundation, (Santiago), National Council of Culture and Arts (Santiago).

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