

ENG

Son.

Imprints and
figurations
in Valls d'Àneu

An intervention by
oriol vilapuig

12th March—27th September 2020

What sense do images of the past take on when viewed from the present?

oriol vilapuig puts forward this same question while surrounded by images and asks us to join in a physical experience inside a large cube built in the Romanesque art rooms.

The space contains eighty imprints. On one side, images of low-set reliefs taken from 11th and 12th Century water fonts and oil receptacles found in the Romanesque churches of Valls d'Àneu. On the other, shapes of nature found in the territory: leaves, branches, pebbles and cracks of stone. These almost invisible shapes now come to life as images on paper through the technique of frottage.

The exhibition project is complemented by a projection and a book by the author in which images from various archives converse with the imprints.

The Museu Nacional invites contemporary artists to put forward new perspectives on the collection, suggesting new ways of building the past.

THE SPACE

To what degree is an image determined by the place where it came to life? Could it be that images weave inseparable links, or experiences which are more intense, with the places where they were created? What sense do previously sacred spaces acquire in the modern age? What symbolic role does architecture that housed Romanesque art have? What kind of anachronisms are generated when we are overwhelmed by seemingly immemorial gestures, forms and acts? Where does this fascination with images from the past come from? Is it because of the power they have to trap time or, on the contrary, is it their ability to convert one's gaze into a disturbing vehicle in a distant contact?

All these questions can be found in the origin and in the later development of the project that I began in 2003, when I started to investigate the sculpted reliefs in some of the stone fonts found in the Romanesque churches scattered around Valls d'Àneu.

Following two axes, one from south to north – from Sant Pere de Burgal to Alós d'Isil

– and the other from east to west – from Cervi to Son – I obtained the first image using frottage, a technique that allows images to appear through contact, not representation. Frottage also helped to resolve the difficulty in the visibility of some of the more low-set reliefs, adding a performative dimension, as a result of the contact with the object and the action of rubbing.

The three types of granite receptacles which I worked with, were the holy water fonts, the baptismal fonts and the oil receptacle, a characteristic variant of this area of the Pyrenees which, among other things, was used to illuminate the churches. The craftsmen had sculpted ornamental, symbolic and animistic elements, a series of highly expressive iconographies that effectively utilised the small spaces and which connected with certain ancestral forms of representation, a popular, pagan and rural culture, which, in turn, had been equally *hidden* by the most hegemonic historiographical discourses.

However, as my work progressed, the initial study was abandoning its archaeological and documentary posture, and was expanding

into other fields – shapes in nature, cracks, marks, ground pebbles, animal tracks... – all linked to the territory of the Valls d'Àneu, which joined the collection of images which derived from the water and oil receptacles.

Presented in a space built specifically for this exhibition, a fifty-square-metre space, the eighty imprints collected here attempt to arouse the physical and phenomenological experience of being surrounded by images within a symbolic place, a soundboard that restores tensions, tremors and inaudible tones of voice, a submerging of our bodies in a boiling, optical sea.

ABOUT THE IMPRINTS

Fractures and tensions, the crack

The Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg argues that there is no immovable and abstract popular religion. Instead, there is a struggle between the religion of the ruling classes and that of the subordinate classes. This conflict could be symbolised very well through one of the imprints that forms part of the installation, a polysemic image – a river or a lightning

strike – that emerged after tracing a crack in the south wall of the facade of the Sant Joan d’Isil church.

This temple constitutes a true paradigm of architectural boldness, whose apse rises emerging from the interior of an adjacent river. The tension imposed by the force of water on the structure of the building is not only physical, but also ideological and epistemological.

Animism, bestiary

The granite fonts offer an iconographic repertoire where animals emphatically appear. Lions, wild boars, rabbits, lambs, snakes, birds and dragons, in other words, an entire bestiary which, beyond its symbolism, alludes to the animistic character of the images which the project focuses on. It deals with life forms, and in this sense, we must ask ourselves about the role they have fulfilled and do fulfil, not so much for their meaning.

The traditional questions posed when faced with an image are, what does it mean? What are we looking for in it? What was its meaning within its historical time? After breaking through by way of this medium, of

paper being rubbed against the stone, we must consider a new mystery: what do the images expect of us? What ways of living does all the fauna embody, that has just been “personified” in our time?

The bell

From the narrative to the most abstract, from the figurative symbolism of the animals that emerge from the stone receptacles to a central image in the intervention of the museum, where twelve circles of white plaster on a large sheet of black paper can be seen. The image emerged after repeatedly rubbing the base of the bell of the church of Sant Just i Pastor in Son. Today we continue to see its swinging as the pendulum of our vital cycles, a movement that links stars and cells, liturgy and social communication.

PROJECTION, THE SPHERES

Through the metaphor of *Spheres*, a term that rejects the notions of progress and decline, of superiority and inferiority, of avant-garde and retrograde, a vast collection of images from

archives and publications from diverse fields is listed (Fons Juan Eduardo Cirlot, Fons Joan Ainaud de Lasarte and other documentation from the historical found of the Arxiu del Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Arxiu Ramon Violant i Simorra from the Ecomuseu de les Valls d'Àneu, Arxiu Toni Anyó, Fons del Centre Cultural de les Valls d'Àneu, Fons Joaquim Garriga from the Arxiu Històric de Sabadell, and the personal and bibliographic archive of oriol vilapuig).

With the frottage technique, which, as has been said, makes images that inhabit a system of mythical or partial visibility emerge and be brought to the present, the installation procedure emphasises, above all, the communicative capabilities of the invisible, in those gaps where both images are not a hiatus of meaning, but quite the opposite. They are forms of indirect narration, mechanisms where what happens "between images" is diluted or reinforced, their displacements and their intersections.

This cluster of images is crossed by multiple paths, and despite the fact that some of them describe distant life forms, they also exhibit a survival beyond themselves.

PUBLICATION, A VISUAL ATLAS

The third piece of the project is a publication that brings together all previous experiences in book format, and distances itself from being a typical indexation. According to the design of the Berenguer brothers, this volume tries to prolong the rhythms of the intervention in the museum through a bibliographic medium.

A constellation of heterogeneous images that converse with the set of iconographies of the prints, and through their displacements they generate new contexts of interpretation. A necessarily unapproachable optical series, always open and never concluded, a visual seismograph that records the tensions, analogies and collisions of what escapes and cannot be fixed down.

oriol vilapuig

The works of oriol vilapuig (Sabadell, 1964) adopt a methodology which is similar to an essay. Starting from the tradition of that which is pre-existing, his work uses mechanisms of appropriation, reference and assembly as ways to generate renewed imaginations around experiences related to the body, desire, eroticism, loss, fear or time.

ACTIVITIES

Conversations

Through oriol vilapuig, we are inviting artists and thinkers, as well as those who understand the spaces and mechanisms of visual construction, to reflect upon the image as an imprint of its original place.

Presence and loss.

The imprint as an image

Thursday 30th April, 6.30 pm

The other times of the image

Thursday 4th June, 6.30 pm

Free activities. Please sign up on the Museum's website. For information regarding the programme: www.museunacional.cat

Artist's book *Son. Empremtes i figuracions a les Valls d'Àneu* available from the Museum Shop.

#oriolvilapuig

Postponed activities. Please find the new dates on the web.

Musical performance

Magí Serra and Arnau Obiols present the *Brots* project, a dance and musical performance which draws on popular tradition and is inspired by the collection of Romanesque paintings in the Museum.

Saturday 19th September,
6.30 pm

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