

ARTFORUM

MEXICO CITY

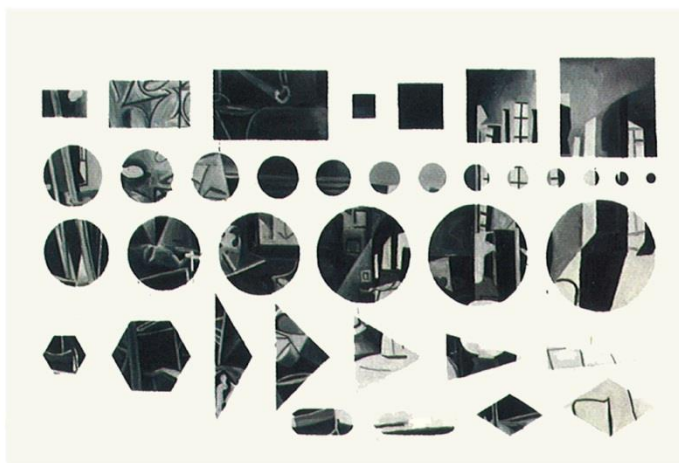
Jorge Macchi

MUSEO UNIVERSITARIO ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO

One of the first works I ever encountered by Jorge Macchi was *Vidas Paralelas* (Parallel Lives), 1998, in which two rectangular pieces of glass with almost identical patterns of cracks are placed next to one another on a simple white platform. The broken pieces of glass exuded a timid but irrefutable silence from within the edges of their fragmentation. There seemed to be a sort of premonition hidden in the temporal disjunction *between* the two panes, each of which condensed the obscure singularity of its originary event. One of the two panes had actually experienced the "original rupture," a single blow inflicted with enough might to yield these random yet irreversible effects. Thus, the (im)possible parallelism of the title disclosed the making of the *other* pane of glass as an exercise in careful repetition, challenging the untranslatable but (almost) repeatable beginning implicit in destruction. The cracks in the second pane of glass, by contrast, emerged in an opposite (though still unpredictable) process: As if sculpting it, the artist had used small, meticulous blows to replicate the form of the first rupture. Insofar as it was impossible to tell which of the two broken panes held the original rupture, it was between those parallel lives that Macchi revealed the imprecise singularity dividing two existences that, though nearly identical, are distinct in terms of the process by which they take shape.

Many years later, I find myself before a new and startling body of work, this time consisting of oil paintings. In this reencounter (which, on a symbolic level, partakes of the same distance that once characterized the cracked panes of glass), Macchi exhibits six large-format canvases that once again give rise to a series of confrontations, replicas, and (in)visible ruptures.

The works in "*Jorge Macchi: Prestidigitador*," curated by Cuahtémoc Medina and Alejandra Labastida for the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo at UNAM (the National Autonomous University of Mexico), could simply be described as abstract paintings steeped in a gestural and expressionistic impulse that ensues beyond any intention except for visually enunciating as forcefully as possible its (de)liberated material existence—unfixed by any discursive determination. *Cover 07*, 2013, acts out this expansive impulse, for instance, with two monumental curved forms that confront each other as crescent pictorial waves or mountains tracing their contours, with an intense cerulean blue battling a seemingly passive yet relentless grayish background inhabited by a million smaller brushstrokes, a battle of colors that slowly confess themselves to the viewer. Other works make use of a strategy that revolves around a savvy visual game, revealing the essential tricks and possibilities afforded by the pictorial surface in compositions with an imprecise system and geometry. From afar, these



Jorge Macchi, *Cover 04*, 2012,
oil on canvas, 6' 4¾" x 10' 2"

two paintings—one in blue-green tones (*Cover 01*, 2012), the other reduced to black, gray, and white (*Cover 04*, 2012)—seem ordained by machine-made geometrical grids that both uncover and fragment what appear to be recognizable objects in an urban scenario. However, when seen up close, the seemingly perfect grids state their irregular handmade traces and imprecisions as well as a playful discontinuity. The clear space between the imperfect geometries not only challenges the conventional figure-ground distinction but also becomes a potentially charged zone of ambiguity.

The recollection of the materiality ensuing *between* those parallel panes of glass still accompanies Macchi's bold new pictorial formulations, anchoring his processes in gestural assertions that refute our faith in our ability to verbally reconstruct them. In the catalogue for the exhibition, Medina condemns in advance any attempt to translate Macchi's painting into discourse. I agree. The challenge these paintings formulate lies in their pictorial materiality as they show us once again that tense space *between* the fracture and the fractured, that no-place inhabited by tireless and harsh negotiations between the freedom of the creative bodily gesture that makes visible the longing to escape not only predictable formal constrictions but also the still-constrained recognition of a preconfigured temporality. Macchi's art embraces the fragmentation of what can be spoken as a defense against the looming specter of its own replicability.

—Marcela Quiroz

Translated from Spanish by Jane Brodie.