

Drawing is Robbio's most regular practice - the exercise of drawing is confounded with his daily life. The artist lives permanently surrounded by sketchbooks, where he takes down ideas, draws objects, ponders technical solutions to the tri-dimensional pieces he envisions. Looking at the sketchbooks he has filled in recent years, we may find plenty of drawings of bridges, aqueducts, viaducts, arches and domes.

In their rigour and impersonality most of the pencil drawings resemble architecture or engineering sketches, or the plans that accompany electric utilities instruction manuals. They resort to signs that are typical of technical scientific drawing, such as arrows or circles that function as tools to magnify certain details.

These drawings do not mean that the artist glorifies functionality, quite the contrary. Also, they do not mean that the artist merely observes and records, or sees the world passively. Firstly, as it has been written already, most of Nicolás Robbio's projects liberate materials and objects from their usage value - engines, mechanisms and pulleys, for instance, are not used to effortlessly perform a practical, concrete action, but only to highlight certain physical phenomena that we are normally unaware of; secondly Robbio's drawings and tri-dimensional pieces highlight things that already exist but that we don't usually see - which does not mean that the artist merely observes, especially because he owns the actions of deciphering, editing and placing things in a context in which people will finally pay attention to them.

Nicolás Robbio sees drawing and sculpture as ways of addressing the transitory character of all things. His frequent use of poor, precarious materials - such as paper, plants, tree branches - and his resorting to improvisation cannot be explained by the fact that he is an Argentine living in Brazil: it would be a gross mistake to imagine that poor techniques would express the Third World (a simple, non-exhaustive search on the art produced in South American countries would illustrate the impertinence of such a remark). In Nicolás Robbio's specific case it so happens that he is interested in exploring the intrinsic materiality of art objects (which he never sees as mere translations of an artistic thinking) and also in removing his tri-dimensional work from the commemorative dimension often associated with sculpture. His use of projectors in installations that replicate the entry of natural light in a room, the use of vegetal elements, the obsessive way on using tables, the use of very small scales are all forms found by Robbio to counter the definitive character of sculpture: lights suggest the passage of time; branches and leaves, besides their availability, are materials in constant change; tables, a daily support, become potential stages or platforms for actions; the installations made of small-scale drawings and sculptures not only shake the autonomy of each piece but promote the constant locomotion of the viewer. Furthermore, the artist plays rather skilfully with the viewer's perception by creating objects that are very similar, albeit not identical - or that, despite being bi-dimensional seem to be tri-dimensional - or by confounding figure and background (like in the video where two profile figures dialogue but are first seen as a burning candle) or by taking advantage of transparencies to create shadows that function as veritable drawings (in his tables/vitrines, for instance).

One of Nicolás Robbio's most recent solo exhibitions took place in Cyprus, at the Pharos Centre for Contemporary Art. There, the artist presented small sculptures representing the typical awnings of the Turkish and Greek sides of the island and the two construction forms typical of both sides of the border. Always aware of the methods

to filter natural light in windows, he also showed two projections replicating the blinds associated with Cypriot houses (again, both Turkish and Greek). This was the exhibition in which the figure of the double, of that which is almost identical, or just slightly asymmetric, or semi-parallel - something recurring in Robbio's work - reached a more clearly political tone. However, this does not mean that his work is usually critical or formalist. Although critical texts on his work emphasize formal rather than political aspects (the delicate forms, the precarious materials, the fugacious installations), his work proves that it is possible to do art politically without resorting to pamphlet-like signs or to a certain rhetoric of social exchange.

Nicolás Robbio is an avid reader of fantastic literature written by his compatriots Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares. The latter, was always able to skilfully mix a sober, descriptive style with the absolutely bizarre in narratives where the extraordinary irrupts from the banal and from daily life. Themes like persecution and evasion, and scenarios like prisons and islands are recurring; apparent reality is almost always revealed as a kind of deceiving scenario. Apparently neutral, Casares' books are highly politicized; so too the constant unfolding of reality, the use of the figure of the double and the attacks on our perceptive certainties carried out by Nicolás Robbio; to say nothing of his stubbornness in producing works that anyone with access to a drawing or a photo of the pieces can reconstruct, or the form he has chosen to 'publish' his drawings by tattooing them on the skin of friends and acquaintances, or even on the skin of gallery owners and curators who invite him to exhibit.

Text: Ricardo Nicolau (2009)