

SEAN SCULLY
NEO NEO INC.
447 WEST 17 STREET NY, NY 10011
212.243.3988 FAX 212.243.0427
NEONEO1@EARTHLINK.NET

PAULA ALZUGARAY

“TROPICO”

(Questions to Sean Scully on the occasion of *Sean Scully: Wall of Light*,
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1). What does the works you are planning in Rochina consist of? Does it include photographs and paintings?

Photographs. My idea is to take photos of children and their physical universe, inside and outside their house and their windows.

2). Is this work part of the series “ Wall of Light”?

No, that is painting and watercolors and pastels.

3). Once you said the language you use is part of the contemporary world: a language of modular repetition. Do you expect to find in the favela the same characteristics, or do you think the favela has its own particular aesthetic?

Its both. Everybody has a sound system, everybody uses bricks to build their houses. They all have mass-produced door handles, shoes, toothbrushes and everything else. However the spaces between everything that is mass-produced. Are individually invented, and thought of to solve specific problems.

4). What was your first contact with Rochina? What did you previously know about it?

When I came to Sao Paulo Bienal with my paintings, I came in direct contact with the favela.

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5). *What particularly interests you about Rochina?*

It demonstrates an extraordinary human capacity to make something cultural out of poverty. I have respect for it. I admire it.

6). *Do you relate the irregular and casual aspect of your painting (a humanized structure, lifted by hand) of the favela with the handmade quality of your paintings?*

This is a fascinating question. I fight the de-humanizing affect of the technological juggernaut that is flattening out the world and all its individuality: by making paintings that can only be made with the hand, and with emotional, individual human effort and faith. Our future spirituality depends on our ability to resist being sanitized, neutralized and de-personalized by mass-media experiences (which are all clichés) and pure materialism. Now we have to fight to use our own handwriting. This is one small example of the depth of the invasion into our personal-spiritual space. The favela is poor, but it is also vital. It is put together in a way that cannot be exactly duplicated.

7). *What is the relationship you're your abstract painting keeps with the visual world? (Is your creative process rooted in the visible world?)*

It is painted with personality. I take a simple structural idea that has been neutralized and I try to bring it into the world of human body experience and reference to nature and the colors of nature. The drawing in my work is repetitive, however, it is always resisting submission to the impersonal or overly-conceptual. I have done the opposite of the conceptual, abstract painters I see around me. I have tried to humanize abstraction by making references to the natural and spiritual world and the world of emotions.

8). *Which world is this? What are the elements of the world that are reinterpreted in your works? Does it always come from the architectural world: walls, windows, doors, horizons?*

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I am fascinated by the facades and openings into the light, that one sees in windows and doors. They seem to hide, promise and reveal the layers of our mental and architectural spaces.

9). Does your work act in the edge of visibility?/

My work pushes the limits of abstraction. That is its interest. One might say it is based on lust. The desire to have everything. The sensual/body power of figuration and the sublime universal potential of abstraction. This seems like an impossibility. But so does everything before it is done. I want to unify both of those human needs and possibilities.

10). Built by non-architects, favelas are considered non-architecture, since they are marginal to architecture. Does it make any sense to you?

It is absurd to say that the favelas are non-architecture. If someone paints a painting and they are not a qualified painter; does it mean that it is not a painting? My favorite architect is Tadeo Ando, and he is an ex-boxer, and self-trained. Favelas are full of site specific problem solving solutions, where poor materials are stretched to their limits. That conforms to my idea of invention.

11). Once you wrote: "I am trying to capture something that has a classical stillness and at the same time has enough emotion or dissonance to create an unresolved quality..." Is this fragile and ephemeral state of things what you are looking for in Rochina?

Yes. The reality of a constantly evolving organic reality is fascinating. It is like walking around inside a cubist painting, that is expanding.

12). What is your particular idea about ideas of vulnerability, ruin and decay?

Ruin and decay are part of our struggle with time. And testament to our fragile mortality. All our buildings fall down, it's only a question of time. This leaves us with nothing but our idea of ourselves, that we can pass on to those who come after us. This is my notion of spirituality. It is bound up in the community of us and our evolution toward something better.

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III Photography and painting

13). How are these two activities related in your work?

Photography is taking. It is voyeurism. Painting is making. Starting with nothing. In that sense its permanently primitive.

14). How do you see the relation between painting and photography in contemporary art?

I believe we have reached a point in our cultural history: of reflections and a degree of exhaustion. We are uncertain as to how to proceed. Thus the momentary collapse of modernism. So its natural to want to take pictures (photos) of what we have made and how we look, and how the world looks. In addition artists are doubtful about the general global goodness of our world of industrialization. So we want to look at ourselves and what we are. And so we need a historical moment to breath. We need to know ourselves better, before we can make future structures. I think photography is part of this.

The less positive aspect of photography is that it represents a disturbing contemporary tendency towards indirect, received, and sanitized experience. The German photographers represent this preference for a kind of blank perfection.

The surface of the world is becoming neutralized. Everything is beginning to be like everything else. And the problem is that people are force fed a diet of floating images, whose surfaces have no personality, or on might argue: whose surfaces have the same 'one' personality; photography and television.

There is a whole generation of painters who have capitulated to this pressure, in an attempt to appear "relevant" and compatible with other technological and media forms. Since there are critics writing today, who consider the desire to resist this neutralization of the surface of painting, and this direct emotional appeal: to be merely nostalgic. They have played a negative role in this relationship by putting pressure on the painters to find strategies in their paintings where they can "conceptualize" the potential for generating emotion in the brushstroke, for example. Where a distance can be opened up, and a greater "analytical" stance can be achieved. This is typified by the photographic appearance of many paintings, that one sees around these days. Where an elegant mechanical strategy is used to achieve novel and visual effects.

This, I believe, is a part of the need to examine what we have made so far, rather than making with belief. I understand its causes, though in relation to painting, I consider it ultimately to be decorative sophism.

In my own painting, I have responded to the current situation by making my paintings as an extreme example of what is possible with a painted surface. I have tried to make a universality with personality. Or what I have called a permanent moment: where a surface is made by hand, and shapes and relationships are built up with layers of

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color that result in emotionally complex edges and surfaces: that can be seen and felt in a moment

I believe that the central issues in painting have shifted towards the manner in which the image is interpreted and painted. Of course, painters need images. But the image is re-seen now through its interpretation

15). And how about the light? How does it fall on your work?