

## EDUARDO BARCO: HUSH TALK DESTROY BUILD

Alfonso de la Torre

Speak Now.

Constantly probing the limits of space, Eduardo Barco (Ciudad Real, 1970) has the guise of a restless artist, returning once and again to the abstract avant-gardes, like a contemporary flâneur strolling—detached but at once steadfast—through the history of art, wandering among the aforementioned movements which, more than paying homage, he negotiates with an analytic though apparently distracted perspective, always tinged with raw emotion. He takes a somewhat geometric course which he charts from new ways of looking which, at times, would seem to make the course stagger drunkenly. To be sure, such an unquenchable thirst brings to mind Pablo Palazuelo's *lache / j'ai soif, / je veux / ce regne*,<sup>1</sup> as he painted by night in Saint-Jacques, *sur noir*, blinded by the stained glass windows of neighbouring Saint-Séverin. Here we have an identical exhaustive gaze in a dogged analysis of forms, in an endless quest in search of the haunting *realm* which, as I told him, is to be found in the writing of another tireless twentieth century geometer: *go, come, go again*.<sup>2</sup>

To a certain extent, the roving voice of the linealist Loló Soldevilla finds an echo in the title of this exhibition by Barco, bearer of an additional verb in the infinitive, forming a sequence of words in a line: *build destroy talk hush*, straight up, without pause or punctuation. Or the reverse of our title here, *hush talk destroy build*. This coupling of construction-destruction, a prototypal pairing in Informalismo,<sup>3</sup> ought to be read, not as a nihilist proclamation, but as a kind of generator of forms, once again: *go, come, go again*.

The word is another of the artist's silent objects of reflection, as he comes and goes, moving about with a distracted air among the noise of the world, absorbed, captivated by forms. An emotional artist, Barco is a true dreamer and defender of the lethargy of the lines he ruminates on, deeply and ironically, until eventually writing his delightful "Pensamientos lineales" (2015),<sup>4</sup> alluring letters where the line meets the word, his *linear thoughts*, in which I can discern a certain surreal linealism that could well endorse the fondly-recalled "let the lines talk."<sup>5</sup> While contemplating his works I am reminded of Cendrars' roadmaps,<sup>6</sup> travelling along the lines towards *Utopialand*.

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1 PALAZUELO, Pablo. *Pablo Palazuelo. Inextinguible llama. Poemas (Antología de Alfonso de la Torre)*. Madrid: Ediciones del Umbral-Colección Invisible, no. 1, 2015-2016, p. 13. Barco would also use the term "thirst" metaphorically in his "Pensamientos lineales", mentioned later.

2 SOLDEVILLA, Loló. *Ir, venir, volver a ir: crónicas (1952-1957)*. Havana: Editorial R(evolución), 1963.

3 MILLARES, Manolo. *Destrucción-construcción en mi pintura*. Madrid: "Acento Cultural", nos. 12-13, 1961.

4 BARCO, Eduardo. *Pensamientos lineales*. Ciudad Real: Colección Ojo de pez-Diputación Provincial, no. 88, 2015.

5 ESTEBAN, Claude-PALAZUELO, Pablo. *Palazuelo*. Paris: Éditions Maeght, 1980.

6 CENDRARS, Blaise. *Feuilles de route*. Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1924.

Completely shrouded in a solitary mantle, Eduardo Barco is another knight of solitude<sup>7</sup> at work in an ample studio, tucked away in a labyrinth of streets reminiscent of the district of arcades, not far removed from where the hushed Gerardo Rueda made his first constructions back in the fifties. I was also reminded of Impasse Ronsin, cutting through the deep passageway that leads to his workshop, of shadows and plants, where he happily locks himself away alone among his forms, like Brancusi. I was reading Piglia at the time and I underlined this sentence that made me think of the artist: “he is one of those men that stubbornly keep advancing with their work come what may, as if there was nothing else they could do (...) all he cared about was finding a voice for his secret work.”<sup>8</sup>

An artist fit to be inducted into the brotherhood of the silent ones, I once wrote that his painterly progenitors could well include José Victoriano González, aka Juan Gris, who wrote about *a new way of seeing the world*.

And now, speaking of Barco’s perpetual restlessness, I am prompted to twist Gris’s sentence, given that the artist at hand possesses a spirit able to twist the odd straight line, at once fastidious and exploratory, a confessed prospector of the accidents of painting.

A painter who seems to paint as if he has nothing to lose, Barco is a maker of dreams, often erected in space delicately with the bare minimum. Using materials or elements that strike one as essential or indeed abandoned along the side of the creative road, the artist’s voice is thin and measured, uttered in a mumbling yet extraordinarily effective language that is able to create a space heaving with activity. Navigating his way through said space, swerving around familiar narratives, his silent pace does not prevent him from availing of the opportunity to catch a fleeting glimpse of the world of forms. And, returning once again, exercising a constant art of restraint, Barco is a poet of forms who seems to study them analytically and make his way through them, redolent of the lethargy of a cast spell. He is in possession of consummate control that allows him to draw lines, planes, circles or to apply colours that are often extended fluidly, dissolved, like an incoming tide, ebbing and flowing within the boundaries of the lines,<sup>9</sup> with the colour lightly caressing the roadstead where circles and various forms navigate, like a voyage in pursuit of forms, a sacred *noli me tangere*. And so it goes with his works on paper, where Barco moves with concentration, able to bring together drawing cycles that recall a certain cubist air or perhaps other times surreal forms or Kleeian mysteries, or even, taking pleasure in

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7 DE LA TORRE, Alfonso. *Pablo Palazuelo: el caballero de la soledad*. Madrid: Galería Fernández Braso, 2016. The term is taken from: FAVRE, Louis-Paul. *Palazuelo. Chevalier de la solitude*. Paris: “Combat-Le journal de Paris”, no. 3327, 14/III/1955, p. 7.

8 PIGLIA, Ricardo. *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi. Los años felices*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2016, p. 245.

9 “Every individual persists with his motifs. I invariably work with the LINE. A concept full of concepts that I keep adding to (...) because for me the line is the basic, the minimum and the maximum. Because I want to convey and read everything in a line, or in two brief lines. (...) Because the line is ubiquitous, it is everywhere but fortunately it is not everything. It is not enough. (...)”. BARCO, Eduardo. *Pensamientos lineales*. Op. cit.

the exercise of a minimum drawing, a lightness of being, that moves him closer to nothingness, probing the very limits of vanishing altogether.

Or, in his often ligneous sculptural constructions, elements are brought together by means of the technique of collage. He engages to some degree with assemblage, at times Schwittersian, other times Palazuelian when he commits himself to hoisting folded forms or twisted angles. At these times Barco reminds me of *The Art of Assemblage*—the mythical exhibition at MoMA in the sixties<sup>10</sup>—in which his work would have fitted to perfection. A legacy of the aforementioned cubists, I sometimes discern in him a pan-Brazilian demeanour, as I reminded him lately when writing about Lygia Clark's images and *propositions*.

Eduardo Barco frequently engages with the use of minimal means—"minimal means-maximum effect" to cite his much-admired Josef Albers, Alexander Calder and Ellsworth Kelly—in a joyful exercise in lightness that always evokes an emotional sense of the aesthetic experience: and so Barco arrives at a homage to the apparently simple, yet coming from an arduous process of elaboration, this emotiveness subjected to an odd intensity that questions colour, forms and, in short, explores what would seem to be forgotten corners of perception and of memory, even questioning the very ability to see. Many of his works, through brief citations, appear to underscore or modify the space, while *The Interlocutor* is invited to share this singular aesthetic experience that, besides referencing the space, also introduces other elements, such as time, by means of the perception of the slight changes inscribed in it. In this way, by eschewing all grandiloquence, Eduardo Barco seems to be saying that a minimal amount of space can contain the world.

Sensitive and serious, he is, as I told him some time ago, like a researcher working with the visible.<sup>11</sup> A resilient artist whose practice is an obsessive quest, as one can easily discern in his series, such as "Serie 42" or in the set of beautiful small drawings on show at Tasman Projects, which vouch for this research into the pictorial space not exempt from a melancholic, ironical and indeed paradoxical gaze, embracing even the very act of seeing, a gaze that is able to take his process of questioning from incisive seriousness and maximum intensity to the trembling suspension of nothingness. His art perchance arises in the pure dawn of paper, and also from the tangled mesh of defeat and thus gives fertile rise to the stroke of ink or graphite from the erasure, from what once was and is, almost as if we had a premonition of the shudder that accompanies the emergence of strange, powerful

10 The Museum of Modern Art, *The Art of Assemblage*, New York, 2 October - 12 November 1961, touring to The Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts, 9 January - 11 February 1962 and San Francisco Museum of Art, 3 March - 15 April 1962.

11 I am referencing his inclusion in *El trabajo de lo visible*, the exhibition at Galería Odalys, Madrid, 20 November 2014 - 17 January 2015. I wrote about Eduardo Barco that "one of the keys to his poetic is based on the creation of works by means of apparently veiled colouring, with something of Kleeian pride in *I am a painter*, a habitué of the humble canvas co-opting its very seams, like yet another element, into the artist's particular orthogonal painterly geography. This *ancient* painter shows with his paints, (...) the belief—not exempt from risk—faced with the new art world so suspicious of the use of conventional supports, in the possibility of saying—even more difficult—new things from apparently traditional concepts. He extracts from it iconic paintings in which one ought to underscore the presence of a hushed voice with an unquestionable personal tone". TORRE, Alfonso de la. *El trabajo (y anhelo) de lo visible*. Exhibition catalogue (ibid).

forms.<sup>12</sup> It has been said that, on occasion, his forms fluctuate like water and the atmosphere, shifting between the compact and the fluid, recalling Klee's mysterious statement: "knowing that things can also happen differently, that there are regions in which **other laws** are in force, for which new symbols must be found (...) the atmospheric zone, and its heavier sister the watery zone, can lend us a helping hand by which eventually to reach cosmic space."<sup>13</sup> Sometimes his creations probe the very limits and Eduardo Barco also refers to the meagreness of the linear realm as a place to inhabit and proposes instead a flight from linearity and two-dimensional restrictions.

Earlier, for instance in the aforementioned complex "Serie 42" (2013), Eduardo Barco disclosed his fondness for a certain serialist music, the reiteration of rectangular formats, meeting horizontally and vertically, which are then titled with combinations of letters, as if to demand from the beholder the maximum possible concentration in the events that take place in the painting rather than being distracted by the artful musicality of evocative titles. Paintings that seem to reflect the melancholia of their notebook-drawing-brothers, to borrow from Barco himself, though in their making one can deduce the importance of the materials used, which become, in his own words, "inhabitants of this real place."<sup>14</sup>

Room and nomadism are two vital terms in Eduardo Barco's practice, given that it is a kind of journeying construed from an endeavour to grasp a resounding dispossession. Nonetheless, this does not prevent him from drifting between forms and lines, at times reticent, with the distracted air of other times, wandering creating and then moving on again, as if he were leaving traces of his roaming along the road that will lead him to *utopialand*. And, as we said earlier on, he is able to revisit the history of painting, while at once immediately referencing how his proposals enter into collision with it. In quest of the perfection of the unfinished, of the creation of mysterious symbols, of how to expand forms in painting, like his much-admired Blinky Palermo, Eduardo Barco is an artist who tirelessly explores as he ponders. And of course he also reflects on time, given that his work seems to be constantly referring to the classic *ars longa vita brevis est*, his gaze settling on the fragile and the fleeting; that which, like water, slips between our fingers.

I am reminded of Huysmans when he spoke of Whistler:<sup>15</sup> Eduardo Barco is a super-lucid artist. An artist who is extremely demanding in his quest, a restless and super-lucid creator, able to reconcile order and vibration: a painter, a draughtsman, a

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12 In a letter from Pablo Palazuelo to Eduardo Chillida. Paris, late December 1951. "(...) I am working (...), above all else on drawings, as I can foreshadow a big change, I need to go deeper, a more intense and purer emotion, and there are times when I get a kind of fever and shivers when sensing it. I still haven't arrived, but it is there, I am sure of it. If not, I wouldn't feel it the way I do". Courtesy of Fundación Pablo Palazuelo.

13 KLEE, Paul. *Cours du Bauhaus-Weimar 1921-1922. Contributions à la théorie de la forme picturale*. Paris: Éditions des Musées de Strasbourg-Editions Hazan, 2004. "Cours V" 30/1/1922, note 64, p. 96 in cited edition. Klee underscored the terms "atmospheric" and "watery".

14 BARCO, Eduardo. *Serie 42*. Madrid: 2013. From the artist's archive.

15 HUYSMANS, Joris-Karl. *El Arte Moderno. Algunos*. Madrid: Tecnos, 2016, p. 178.

builder of forms in space, an explorer of vision and an obsessive demiurge of newly created images. Indeed, for Eduardo Barco images are not so much a goal to reach as another opportunity to tirelessly continue to launch into the air questions on the fire that consumes him.