

ADRIÁN MARTÍNEZ

QUE LA CUMBIA SUENE MÁS FUERTE QUE LOS PROBLEMAS

23.05-31.08.25

Curatorial text. Esmeralda Gómez Galera

The work of Adrián Martínez (Eivissa, 1984) is defined by its emphasis on narrative, use of humour and the bonds he forges between territory and materials. His new exhibition at Es Baluard Museu, “Que la cumbia suene más fuerte que los problemas” [May the Cumbia Sound Louder than Any Problem], is a celebration of resilience, capturing the frustrations inherent to artistic practice as well as the potential to transcend them by weaving networks of collaboration.

Conceived specifically for this exhibition, these pieces are the result of a dialogue with the productive possibilities of the immediate context. Through the use of local wool, dyed using natural sources, as well as structures combining organic materials and craft techniques, the project unfolds as a form of expanded painting, in an intimate relationship with the landscape. In this way, painting is rooted in a specific territory and an economy of traditional ways of knowledge, revealing the histories and processes that live within the materials themselves.

Metallic structures hold up pieces of felt that are unfolded, hang and stretch out until they brush the floor. Their layout creates a territory to explore within the exhibition space, generating small-scale architectures inspired by carpet hangers, which refer to the textile tradition as well as to community uses of public space. Along with these works, the animated videos activate the gallery with repetitive sounds, contributing to the creation of an immersive environment.

On a narrative level, the exhibition addresses contradictions in the world of art, appealing to critical humour by encouraging us to question its structures and dynamics, from the studio to the museum itself. What does it mean to collaborate in this context? How are artistic conventions defined? In what way are they related to the sense of belonging or to ecology? Using drawings and animation with references to the absurd, Martínez explores the paradoxes and frustrations of the pictorial process, exposing the tensions between artistic practice and the context it is embedded in.

The exhibition is put together in relation to six curatorial concepts that are representative of the artist’s work, flexibly approaching that experimental moment defining his most recent work:

- Traversing the Landscape
- Observing the Surroundings
- Weaving Networks
- Listening to Materials
- Expanding Painting
- Opening Lines of Flight

Rather than dealing with closed concepts, these actions are in transit, moving along paths that explore the relationship of his felt pieces with the landscape, the art world, artisanal and collaborative facets, the questioning of pictorial medium and the critical role of humour.

I. Traversing the Landscape

One of the characters appearing in the felt pieces complains because he is not able to depict the power of nature on the canvas. He does this on the edge of a cliff, with a glimpse of a river, clouds and mountains in the background. This is a commentary on the ambitions of romantic painting, but also a kind of meta-painting that highlights the ongoing conflict between presence and representation. In the work of Adrián Martínez, this conflict has a twinned significance. On the one hand there is the pictorial motif, composed of characters, landscape and language; on the other there is the very materiality of the works, given that the felt, plants and dyes are already a tangible commentary on the power of nature.

How can a painting relate to landscape beyond its mere depiction? One response would point precisely to the use of materials that carry the very landscape with them, like miniature sprouts. Materials have memory and provide clues as to their surroundings, especially when they come from the sheep's wool used to make felt, or the leaf of a tree supplying the colour of the dye. Following Francesco Careri, walking was the first aesthetic form to intervene in the landscape, since while traversing it, signs and imprints were left upon it, subtly altering it:

“By modifying the sense of the space crossed, walking becomes man's first aesthetic act, penetrating the territories of chaos, constructing an order on which to develop the architecture of *situated objects* . . . This simple action has given rise to the most important relationships man has established with the land, the territory.”¹

This early relationship that walking establishes with the landscape evolved from those initial signs/footprints, all the way up to walking aesthetics as fully developed in contemporary art in the late 1960s, whether in long country walks or urban drifts whose roots went back to *flânerie*. Sometimes, these two worlds, rural and urban, met in more liminal proposals. For example, in *Cuentos patrióticos* [Patriotic Tales] (1997), Belgian artist Francis Alÿs led a flock of sheep in circles around the national flag, raised in the centre of the Zócalo in Mexico City.² While the work of Adrián Martínez does not make use of walking directly, it does feature a certain sensibility that is bound to the action of traversing the landscape, while also allowing the landscape to cut through those traversing it. The materials he employs, as well as the layout of the work in the exhibition space, connect us to questions like these, related to the journey itself.

II. Observing the Surroundings

From this sensibility, bound to routes and inhabitation, we might emphasise the importance of attentive observation and the capacity to find inspiration in the everyday. In this regard, apparently insignificant details of the surroundings might unleash processes of ideation and creation. For example, the artist made a comment to me about how seeing a sagging sunflower had given him the idea for some of his first metal sculptures: slightly anthropomorphic tripods that were used as supports for his video animations. These kinds of heightened observations, giving rise

1. Careri, Francesco. *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*. 6th Printing. Barcelona: Ediciones Gustavo Gili, 2009, p. 20.

2. In this work, Alÿs developed a political commentary on the Mexican Student Movement and the 1968 revolts in Mexico.

to ideas, are increasingly infrequent in a time dominated by endless diversions. However, they continue to be essential for the elaboration of aesthetic thought and artistic practice.

In the work of Adrián Martínez, this observation is made manifest on two different levels: on the one hand, as an experiential registry that feeds his studio practice, as in the case of the withered sunflower; and on the other hand, his surroundings are likewise the direct source of the materials he employs. On his own piece of land, the artist grows various kinds of plants and trees that will be later included in his processes. The wool he uses for his felt pieces is dyed with natural tints extracted from these very plants. To give an example, pomegranate gives a dark yellow tone. When mixed with iron, in turn, it shifts towards green. In this process, which has some relation to alchemy, other intervening factors involve the times and temperatures at which the felt pieces are soaked in the dyes. Olive leaves give him a soft, luminous yellow tone. Warm tones are present in many of his works, with reds, oranges and ochres extracted from madder root, while the browns and some pinks come from the natural tone of sheep's wool.

This process is coherent and natural, and is steeped in the values of proximity and respect for materials. The palette is limited, restricted by the tones derived from the surroundings and the possibilities of nature. This results in painting that is connected to the surrounding landscape. What of the transhumance of herd animals and the sedentary character of agriculture? Perhaps these are two ways of inhabiting the territory that are present in the same process. This proximity of materials, especially on an island where almost everything is imported, could become an act of resistance. The image of the shipwrecked individual, as a metaphor for the island condition, arises over and over again in his drawings, which are the source both for the scenes depicted in his felt pieces and his video animations. Yet it is also representative of the loneliness of the creative process, where the island becomes the studio itself.

Narrative plays a vital role in these canvases. Quite often, the content of these works shows us another way of paying attention to our surroundings: the way referring to commentary on the art world. While in one a shipwrecked person paints on an island, only to be surprised by the process itself, another felt piece refers to the moment when works change context. From the contingency of the studio to socially-conditioned modes of reception in the museum. As Pierre Bourdieu observed, the reception of art is mediated by the "artistic field", a space of social relationships where taste, symbolic value and legitimacy are constructed by agents through varied forms of cultural capital.³ Within this framework, the artwork is inscribed in a system of institutional validation. In relation to this, critical commentaries emerge, with a touch of humour, making us aware of the codes we deal with in the world of art, which at times tends to close in on itself. However, as Howard S. Becker has stated, absolutely everything in the worlds of art is a collective activity, which brings us to the next point.

III. Weaving Networks

"All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation."⁴

The notion of collaboration plays a key role in Adrián Martínez's work processes. For example, the inclusion of wool in his artistic practice came about after becoming aware of a

3. See Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

4. Becker, S. Howard. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1982, p. 17.

project to revive this material in Mallorca.⁵ While wool is used for various craft purposes, only a few artists have set about to collaborate in this way to explore its aesthetic and conceptual possibilities, manifesting their desire to include such materials and processes in their own practices.

He has also relied on collaboration with local craftspeople to make the metallic structures that hold up his felt pieces. In these kinds of collaborative processes, a key question comes to the fore: is it possible to give instructions to craftspeople, while at the same time allowing leeway for the hands of others and the memory accumulated in them? As Sennett has argued, craft is a form of knowledge that connects us with a long history, where skills are honed by ongoing practice, repetition and collaboration. It is embodied knowledge, binding together past and present, technique and experience, the hand and thought.

One of the main differences is perhaps in the utility or non-utility of objects, and especially in the concepts of value and authorship. In this project, however, there is an urge to open up to other forms of knowledge, and to do so in an unbiased manner, without trying to stiffly delineate craft space from artistic space. This premise is first grounded in the very etymological root of the word (*ars*, 'art'/'craft'), and continues in the meaning of listening.

IV. Listening to Materials

One of the most essential aspects of craft is the willingness to listen to materials: tactile, direct listening. In this sense, Adrián Martínez's focus reflects the same approach, for example, in how he employs wool, including dyeing it using natural processes. The format is defined by the width of the machinery making the felt, and the display is not intended to hide a thing. Quite the contrary: within each piece there is a large amount of information, like small plants, seeds and flowers, trapped in a process that offers organic clues on where the material might be from.

This emphasis reflects what Sennett describes as the craftsman's ethical impulse, the dedication to a job well done, respecting both the materials and the process. Instead of imposing a preconceived shape on the work, it involves allowing the materials and their natural behaviour to guide the final result. This process places value on error and imperfection as essential features of apprenticeship and creation. Craft is here both an act of resistance and a celebration of patience and skill. In this sense, understanding a material does not mean to dominate it, but to allow oneself to be guided by what the material is able to do and what it cannot.⁶

Perhaps this same respect for materials and a listening attitude could be applied to the exhibition itself. Yet not as an end in itself: it is a stage along the way, on a continuous line that encourages new paths and expansions of the medium.

V. Expanding Painting

As we have seen in this path along various lines/actions, the felt pieces included in this exhibition could be understood as a kind of expanded painting, in close relation with landscape, cartography and communitarian or collaborative perspectives. These works are not here to simply depict a context, but seek to include it tangibly through the materials employed. Furthermore, they go quite beyond the two-dimensional surface, signalling the physical and sensorial experience of the space. The experimental design of the display responds to this expansiveness, interacting directly with the architecture of the exhibition gallery.

5. *Llanatura* is a multi-disciplinary project based in Inca, dedicated to resuscitating the value of Mallorcan wool by combining craft, design and innovation. The aim is to "create exchange value with a model based on an economy rooted in the territory, with an emphasis on ecological transition and social transformation."

6. See Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*. London: Penguin, 2008.

Volume seems to come along with the cloth pieces, giving them a presence beyond values of visual narrative. These pieces occupy the space actively, wrapping and sagging, allowing gravity and balance to play a key role in their presentation. The cloth pieces are impacted by this interaction with the surroundings, curling with the materiality of the wool and accentuating the dichotomy between structure and becoming.

In this context, a feature that pertains to the textile tradition as well as the communitarian aspect of public space is introduced: the carpet hanger. These metallic structures are used to hang carpets in the street, where they are cleaned by beating them. They are commonly found in countries like Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Romania, Finland and Sweden. Carpet hangers are particularly interesting in the context of this exhibition for their secondary use, that is, for the way they become minor points of encounter for play and for social life. They have been used not only for the practical function they were conceived for, but also as the scenarios of other ends, like playful exchange and even gymnastics sessions.

In this way, a relational, collective aspect is introduced into the work, broadening the concept of the artistic towards the realms of shared and situated practice. In these structures, life is filtered: bodies play, finding each other, swaying. It is perhaps for this reason that they reappear here, in the museum, as an echo of that simple yet powerful way of inhabiting the commons, where affects and forms of spontaneous sociability arise.

VI. Opening Lines of Flight

One of the most significant characteristics of Adrián Martínez's work is his capacity to open up lines of flight through humour, narrative and language. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari develop the concept of lines of flight as escape paths in the face of power systems, rigid structures or hierarchical modes of thinking. Lines of flight are not a fleeing evasion in the literal sense, but rather a form of movement, of transformation, a possibility to detour from the given so as to invent new ways of existing and thinking. In this regard, they make it possible "to blow apart strata, cut roots, and make new connections".⁷ They are openings enabling us to imagine other possible worlds.

In the same way, the works of Adrián Martínez tend to show a kind of intrinsic exteriority, an opening towards what is outside of the frame. The window, the wild mushroom, a UFO, as metaphors for the studio visit—they are all images that connect us with the external, with a possibility of exit or transit. In many of these works in felt, a tension is set up between insularity—the island, the studio, the canvas—and the outside—travel, landscape, flight. This dialectic is left unresolved, moving instead between isolation and art as a collective activity. Could it be a metaphor of tight-rope walking? In one of the videos in the show, a character walks along the upper part of a white canvas, constantly threatening to lose his balance and fall at any time; yet he continues to move forward regardless, in a precarious context teeming with contradictions.

Adrián Martínez's work opens up these kinds of lines of flight, proposing balances while developing a complex gaze in relation to the surroundings: a gaze that recognizes their possibilities, along with the limitations and tensions that come with them. In these works, there is a will to resist lightly, to think critically without forsaking humour.

The works brought together for this exhibition invite us to pause, to attentively observe what surrounds us, to discover the aesthetic possibilities of materials and rethink the place of painting. They open up lines of flight: they encourage us to listen to what is there on the margins, to pay attention to what tends to be passed over. With this slow and attentive gesture, the materials tell their own stories, affects are woven into them, and artistic practice becomes a situated practice, shared and processual.

7. Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 15.

In a context marked by ecological crisis, production pressures and global tensions, Adrián Martínez proposes a way of being in the world that restores value to craft, community and care. This practice does not shun contradiction, but it insists that it is possible to continue creating, opting for humour, listening and fragility as ways of resistance. His practice, amidst frustrations and discoveries, lets the cumbia keep playing, indeed, a little louder than any problem.

WWW.ESBALUARD.ORG
#ADRIANMARTINEZESBALUARD