

*“What is ‘painting’? I do not reproduce; I do not imitate; I incorporate the matter directly; I cancel the relation between the plastic subject and the predicate—between the surface and the support. I destroy, scribble, damage, crumple up, wring, nail.
A number. A blot (...) discussion and crisis, end of the ontology.”*

Severo Sarduy¹

In *Ritorno in Patagonia*, Paul Theroux affirms: ‘When I think about going somewhere, I think about the south. I associate the word south with freedom.’

Gabriel Kondratiuk comes from that most remote south, from Patagonia: an ‘experience’, which, according to William Henry Hudson, ‘is a journey into an existence of a higher level, to that form of harmony with nature which is the absence of thought (...)’²

From his first day of life, Gabriel Kondratiuk has experienced the atemporal beauty of the ‘two’ Patagonias: the one of his birth, the occidental Patagonia—with the exuberant vegetation, purest slopes, sumptuous mountains, green and blue lakes, glaciers, valleys in transit towards the plateaus; and the oriental one—the absolute nothingness³, desert-like, covered with dry, wind-swept steppes which descend ‘as gigantic steps’ in search of sea level.

Kondratiuk’s work is a response to every ‘day which always seems the first day of the world’⁴, to that unique and primordial landscape, to big skies, huge mountains, indomitable winds. It is also a response to experienced memories or intuitions of the Carpathians of his ancestors⁵, of the Alps of his present residence.

Utilising brushwork, which, like the graphic strokes, often demarcates the edge or the details of the figures, Gabriel Kondratiuk creates a delicate dialogue between forms and textures, rhythms and depths, chromatic quality and achieved musicality, and frees the landscape into a dimension that,

¹ *Ensayos generales sobre el Barroco*, Ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1987.

² On this subject, see: Bruce Chatwin-Paul Theroux, *Ritorno in Patagonia*, Adelphi, Milano, 1995, pp. 14 and 25.

³ ‘It is impossible to think about the changes which have happened on the American continent without experiencing a sensation of deep stupor’, Charles Darwin, 9th January 1834, ‘El viaje del Beagle’, ch. 8 — *Banda Oriental del Uruguay y Patagonia*.

⁴ Enrique Molina, *Memorias Australes*, Ediciones Philippe Daverio, Buenos Aires, 1990, p. 9.

⁵ The immigrants who came from the Carpathians were sent to, or chose, the Andean area near El Bolsón with a landscape similar to theirs. Yet the Carpathians lack the great glaciers, the steep mountain peaks or the extensive snow-covered surfaces and the numerous lakes, which are common in the Argentine Patagonia or in the Alps and which now ‘frame’ the space of Kondratiuk.

beyond a natural representation, is a way of giving rise to sleeping powers and presences. The landscapes return to the spectator the spontaneity which brings them into being, emanating, by means of their contemplation, a feeling of openness and freedom. They are sensitively made with nuances and use of impasto, where the fleck, the graphic strokes and the vigour of the brushwork acquire a protagonist role and arise from a gradual abstraction of natural models (trees, fleshy flowers, landscapes dominated by round forms, moons infinitely multiplied). They are also constructions that achieve the greatest freedom with inner dynamism and chromatic games, which are alien to ordinary conventions (pink and black, yellow, green and black, deep blue, a lighter one, mixed with the green of the lakes). Moreover, they are initial forms that appear to us like yearned or glimpsed images, experiences of mountains, landscapes of flowers, tents in which numerous times the artist has had to spend the night, skies close-by, moons within reach. The variations and the relation between the diverse, consecutive segments of images have the effect that the forms—curvilinear, ovoid, devoid of hardness and always interlaced, as in a living being—interact with each other maintaining their connection with the organic. These forms appear to us as though they arise from the earth, sensually evoking tactile, corporeal, object-like sensitivity.⁶

In light of many of Gabriel Kondratiuk's works, I would like to bring to mind Shitao's *Treatise on Landscape Painting*⁷ as it affirms: 'In the mountains, the qualities of the sky are revealed in infinite ways: the dignity by means of which the mountain obtains its mass; the spirit by means of which the mountain shows its soul, the creativity by means of which the mountain makes its changing mirages, the virtue that forms the mountain's discipline; the movement that animates the mountain's lines of contrast; the silence that the mountain holds in its interior; (...) the harmony that the mountain creates in its turns and bends; (...) the refinement that is shown by the pure grace of the mountain; the temerity that the mountain expresses in its folds and drops, (...)'

Irma Arestizábal

⁶ I think that on this subject we must mention Ivo Mesquita (*Cartographies*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993) as he affirms: 'If we consider that the works by artists are projections of their minds, imaginary maps, realisations of a desire, primary impulses preceding any form, in this case the mind is imagined like a vast prairie from where the works emerge like demarcations of a territory in constant transformation.'

⁷ Shitao (1641-1707), Qing dynasty, *Asumir sus cualidades* (ch. XVIII).