

## OFF THE ROOF

**Fernando Castro Flórez.**  
(September 2010)

You don't have to be a gladiator to "abandon all hope" in an era that started with the Great Demolition (the attack on the WTC, described musicologically as a Wagnerian "total work of art") and the financial collapse (the explosion of the turbo-capitalism bubble and the start of the media hystericisation of markets completely lacking in "confidence"). It is also impossible to think that, with the one that is arriving, after the "Flood" we will have something comparable to the Rainbow. Anyone who sells a future of promise and reconciliation deserves to be stunned for hours by proto-punk shrieks. In this era of post-productive aesthetics and of "stemming" subjectivities, when a fundamentally socio-economic diaspora is confused with tourism because of cynical relationships, we know all too well that the map does not match, in any way, what's on the ground. Total connection, that which Heidegger considered to be fate of metaphysics in the mode of the "device" (*Gestell*) is today part of a "localisation" game that only reveals the synonymy between ubiquity and dislocation, paranoia and complete bunkerisation. Santiago Morilla emphasises, with his *expanded* conception (in the sense thematised by Rosalind Krauss for sculpture) of drawing, what we could call "the will of estrangement". In this way, his colossal project at Korea's GCC entails both architectural aspects and artistic process dynamics, cybernetic viewing through Google and immersion in the image. This immersion only provides fragmentation, that is to say, the obvious discovery that it is impossible to take in what used to be called totality.

Just as Carl Schmidt diagnosed at the end of the 1920s, in the era of neutralisation and depoliticisation, in moving from metaphysics to the economy, we pass through aesthetics. The sickly fringes of romanticism, with all their reactionary ideology, are nothing less than pathetic today, at a time when politics is making way for technocracy. Santiago Morilla's first journey, in every sense, to Korea gives him the curious position of anthropologist. His narration of the things that he has seen is marked by the signs of the flood. He arrived in the country on the 10<sup>th</sup> August 2011 and it can be said, without metaphor, that he started swimming and drinking in all directions. His excited gaze is met with the signs of tremendous floods, but also with the appearance of a UFO. He endures endless rain and visits the island of Jeju-do, where he sees both decorated water tanks and women divers. He suffers six hours on a ferry in a storm and tries to avoid illness while eating the raw fish and squid offered by the local gastronomy. The tides make large areas of the coast disappear as if by magic, in the midst of a setting where shamanism is still very much alive. "Water, tides and floods", notes Morilla, "Containers, fish tanks and decorated water tanks. Their content fresh, suspended in pleasure or lethargy". He has a fascinating talent for storytelling, but also the visual curiosity of old-fashioned travellers, driven, undoubtedly, by the vertiginous nature of modern culture.

Santiago Morilla takes on the museum space as if it were a swimming pool where one can enjoy bathing "or simply 'play dead' and leave just one's head to float, supported by a shamanic float (in the shape of a fox, duck or bear)... in a strange way I feel that I am including these local stories in a- more extensive and public- emotional

map, which saves them from the dark depths of their obscurity. Also, where better for hiding the bald backside of an innocent bather below the surface of the water than an art centre? I estimate that their privates would be about where the admin offices are". In his work on *contextual immersion*, Santiago Morilla does not overlook the fact that the island of Daebu, where the GCC is situated, was the site of the Seongan orphanage during the 35 years of the Japanese invasion. In reality, this orphanage was a concentration and forced labour camp. Some of the children who tried to escape by swimming away from this cruel imprisonment only found the quickest route to death: their drowned bodies are laid to rest in the surrounding woods. In Santiago Morilla's imagination, there is no hint of a desire to make explicit the stories that have fed it, but neither does he want his piece to be treated as a mere "aesthetic" effect. On the contrary, it leaves the meaning open but also condenses narratives and metaphors that reveal a worrying background.

Santiago Morilla is one of those guys who amuses himself by "running around on the roof"; some might add that this is because he is off the wall, or should that be off the roof? It's true that the viewer is made to leave the *White Cube* in order to be in a place that is an architectural *culmination* and, at the same time, a place that leaves us open to the elements. The *state of emergency* means that we all have the potential to be excluded, adding the dimension of being perfect corks or floats to that of *homo sacer*. If, in a tomb near Paestum, a swimmer throws himself into the sea (which is the last vision for the deceased), we today are trying to haul ourselves out of the swamp, in the comic way of Baron Münchhausen, by pulling at the few hairs we have left or, directly, by jumping from a diving board into an empty pool. Things, if I am forgiven for stating the obvious, are very difficult and perhaps even in failure we must have a sense of humour. "If we have to sink", he says with a clearly Hispanic sarcastic streak, "and that's what this shit's about, then it should be with our own floats that we learnt to swim with". Morilla reminds us that *high watermarks* is a term used by brokers to refer to the limit or ceiling that a speculation or fund has reached, but also the horizon that it will never reach. In reality, what has taken place is more than sublimating, elevated, abysmal or depressing. While the philosophical agents in the Pentagon, perfectly embodied by Fukuyama, were singing a lullaby about the "end of ideologies" and others were selling the discourse about shock or dialogues between civilisations, we were hit by the unexpected Tsunami. Then, Clinton stopped Bush (the father, of course- this must be added as if we were talking about the Holy Trinity) in his tracks during a debate by throwing a phrase at him that we should all tattoo somewhere on our person: "It's the economy, stupid".

You don't have to be aware of the Prisoner's Dilemma to be convinced that altruism is not so much discredited as reduced to a problem for ethical dilettantes. We are adrift far beyond the shipwreck that the *splenetic travellers* contemplated, now that touristic desire has relegated the Grand Tour to a picturesque note in archaeological discussions. Santiago Morilla spent enough time in Rome to understand that the weight of history is slightly more than a saying and how the only exit from the decadent atmosphere, in a city that is less a place for melancholy than a theme park for childhood regression, is cunning and cheek. A nihilistic tone is useless, as we cannot hide our shame with "political" proclamations that, in many cases, are perfect materialisations of subsidised radicalism. Without straying into cheap pseudo-activism or supposedly adolescent ornamentality, Santiago Morilla draws and expands figures and stories and goes beyond the current rhetoric of a certain type of drawing, finding his own extremely

fruitful path. His works are both *site specific* and intended for *google-globalisation*. There is, after all, no best viewpoint, but approaches and positions, focuses and dislocated processes, ways of being within the immense artwork or being at a distance, contemplating something extraordinary on a computer. It's about driving us to give (aesthetic) thought to the *outside*, to try to understand the landscape, even if it's from a map that shows just a few figures floating on top of an exhibition space.

"We can", writes Santiago Morilla about his project in Korea, "draw our own waterlines, decide where the level of visibility is and where the immersion starts, we can even construct our own life jackets... but we can also include new markers on the global map, as if it were an old map illustrated with new treasures and dangers". While on the roof of the Academia de España in Rome, he painted an enormous subject dressed as a bird (allegorising both the hypnotic dance of birds and Icarus' failure, the sermons of Saint Francis to those animals able to fly and Saint Peter's inverted crucifixion), on the buildings of the GCC it seems that he has established characters who, more than floating, are dozing in the water. They do not seem to be especially worried, even though they are up to their necks in water and their childish floats are too small to fit around any other part of their body, thus becoming ridiculous headdresses. It would be useless to mention the Freudian oceanic feeling of their reasoning towards cultural unrest, because these enormous characters couldn't touch the bottom even if they had an anchor. We see their faces, devoid of pathos, and their extremities and feet protruding exquisitely out of the water. And, despite the indulgent air of these gigantomachic scenes, it gives the impression that there is an ironic twist, a wink of complicity that warns us that these floaters are about to be swallowed up by nightmares that are as real as what we experience when we're wide awake.

Noemí de Haro García has noted that Santiago Morilla's artistic interventions reveal a context riddled with references, with a high level of conceptual penetration: "In this way, aesthetic estrangement makes part of the significative and emotional potential of a daily structure appear, convincingly and immediately". In Korea, the country with the quickest internet connection in the world, Santiago Morilla makes the apparently outrageous decision to carry out monumental works. It can be said that he does this by transferring the intimate to the immense while employing a well-known question tackled by Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space*. When filmic imagery proposes a fate based on a New Age (pathetic) Apocalypse, such as in the disappointing and hyper-aestheticised versions of *The Tree of Life* (Terence Malick) and *Melancholia* (Lars von Trier), it is useful to trace a line of resistance that stops us transforming into "posthumous men"- perfect masters of epigonism who only contemplate the Event as a miraculous metaphysical mode. The landscape's image marks a point of no return: mother earth has no song dedicated to her. "Flexible accumulation" has been revealed as generalised theft carried out by speculators who had an unexpected safety net: the ultra-liberal State who would show up to the race to hand over the prize to incompetency and financial crime. The "watermarks" on banknotes do not prevent forgeries; rather they confirm that we must swim amid tsunamis of lies of all kind. José Luis Corazón spoke, with great clarity, about the intervention "El accidente de la pintura" (The Accident of Painting) at the Academia in Roma as a "warning for navigators". If the wind drops, we'll have to row. When cyberspace offers us tonnes of friends to waste time with on Social Networks (gossip with opiate qualities), we must, perhaps, learn to draw journeys that are *different* to the old hackneyed ones, inventing maps or adjusting the ones we already have. If Santiago Morilla calls Google Earth a "pseudo-divine

connection”, he is absolutely certain that there we have to cross through the plot of “farce”, that second way of repeating history that, as Marx warned, was tragic in its original manifestation. It is possible that, more than children’s floats (sad remnants that nostalgia couldn’t consign to the rubbish dump and that we claim, with impunity, that we will use again as if they were a normal item), we need a quote, even though it may be tremendously old: “Everything solid dissolves into the air”. Santiago Morilla’s trans-border (designed to be viewed both on-site and at the dissuasive distance of the internet) post-landscape (a series of colossal paintings transferred from drawings) is a *heterotopia* (we remember Foucault’s assertion that, if the 19th Century was obsessed by history, the current era is that of life in simultaneity, “of juxtaposition, the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed”) that throws us a conspiratorial invitation to float on the roof, where we can also remember a world that evaporated a while ago.