

artillery

KILLER TEXT ON ART

REVIEWS

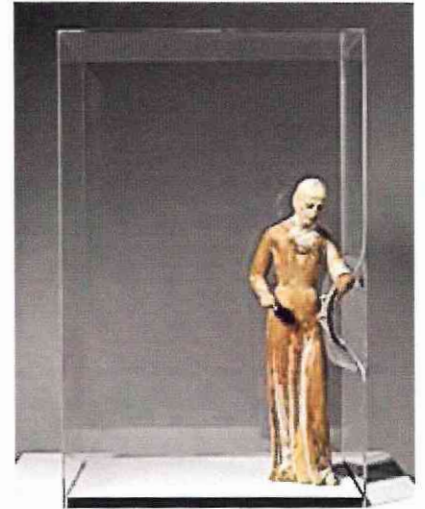
CATALAN ARTIST JORDI ALCARAZ challenges our perceptions with paintings, drawings and sculptures that are both adamantly present and magically elusive. Fluent in the languages of Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel but speaking a uniquely lyrical dialect, Alcaraz addresses our aesthetic expectations only to frustrate and dismantle them. As he does so, he leads us through new phenomenological engagement with art and time, and their infinite possibilities.

"Exercicis de Desaparicio III" (2010) is a handsome painting of black ovals on a matte grey ground. Its large scale, the inky darkness of its resolute discs, and the expressive verve with which they are limned, are all distantly related to Robert Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series. Yet there are significant differences. The ground is cardboard, not canvas, and Alcaraz does as much with charcoal on its malleable surface as he does with paint. Even more unusual is what the younger artist does with the "glass" that hovers over the painting. Actually, it is Plexiglas, not glass per se. And Alcaraz pierces it several times with circular holes that resemble nothing so much as bullet holes. Yet these poetic "bullets" do not rupture the cardboard behind them. Instead, they cast shimmering reflections that function as clear counterpoints to the rounded, dark drops dancing over the rest of the composition. In his "Libre d' Astronomia" (2010), the artist has pierced 11 holes through the Plexiglas and into the blank pages of an old book. Highlights sparkle around the holes in the Plexiglas. Shadowed slivers of text fill the circles pierced in the book. Together they create a dynamic visual dialogue that parallels the way ideas about space and time ricochet among particle physicists debating String Theory.

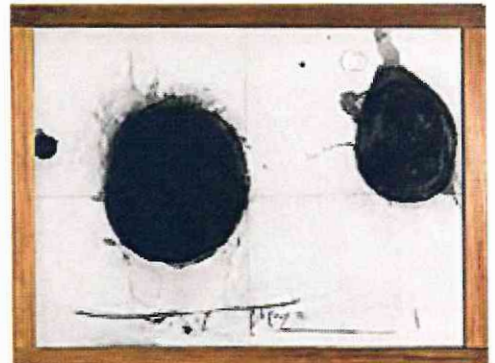
Alcaraz's drawings similarly challenge the history of that medium and what we expect of it. "Exercicis de Desaparicio II" (2010) begins with four of the artist's black planets, orbiting in the upper left corner. To the right is a small hole, illuminating the grey ground like a tiny sun. Connecting them are what appear to be pale lines, but are in fact arcing erasures that cut through a charcoal cloud. In other works, he draws with lengths of wire, tenuously suspended behind the Plexiglas. Or he pours pigment through the holes in the Plexiglas, so that the blackness pools in thick puddles to create the "drawn" forms. Alcaraz's phenomenological play with materials and perceptions recalls the work of his older compatriot Antoni Tàpies (certainly an eminence grise in much of this oeuvre), even as he elegantly transcends it.

The most melancholy piece - and perhaps the most Spanish - is "El Temps" (2010). A distressed wooden saint stands alone in a Plexiglas box. His head is bowed, his eyes cast downward. He reaches forward with one graceful hand to pull back one corner of the box, creating a curtain-like fold, and opening the corner to allow the air of time to enter. The French term *l'air du temps* has become identified with a perfume name, but the phrase originally meant something like *zeitgeist*. Allowing air to move in and through the holes he pierces in his astonishing artworks, Alcaraz enchants the spirit of our times. With the base materials of ink, cardboard, wood and Plexiglas, he juxtaposes consciousness with physical phenomena - and conjures experiential alchemy.

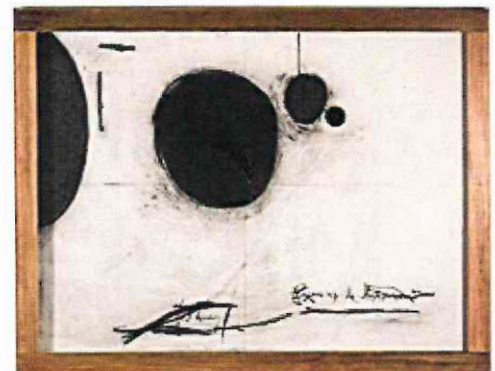
-Betty Ann Brown



"El Temps," 2010



"Exercicis de Desaparicio III," 2010



"Exercicis de Desaparicio II," 2010