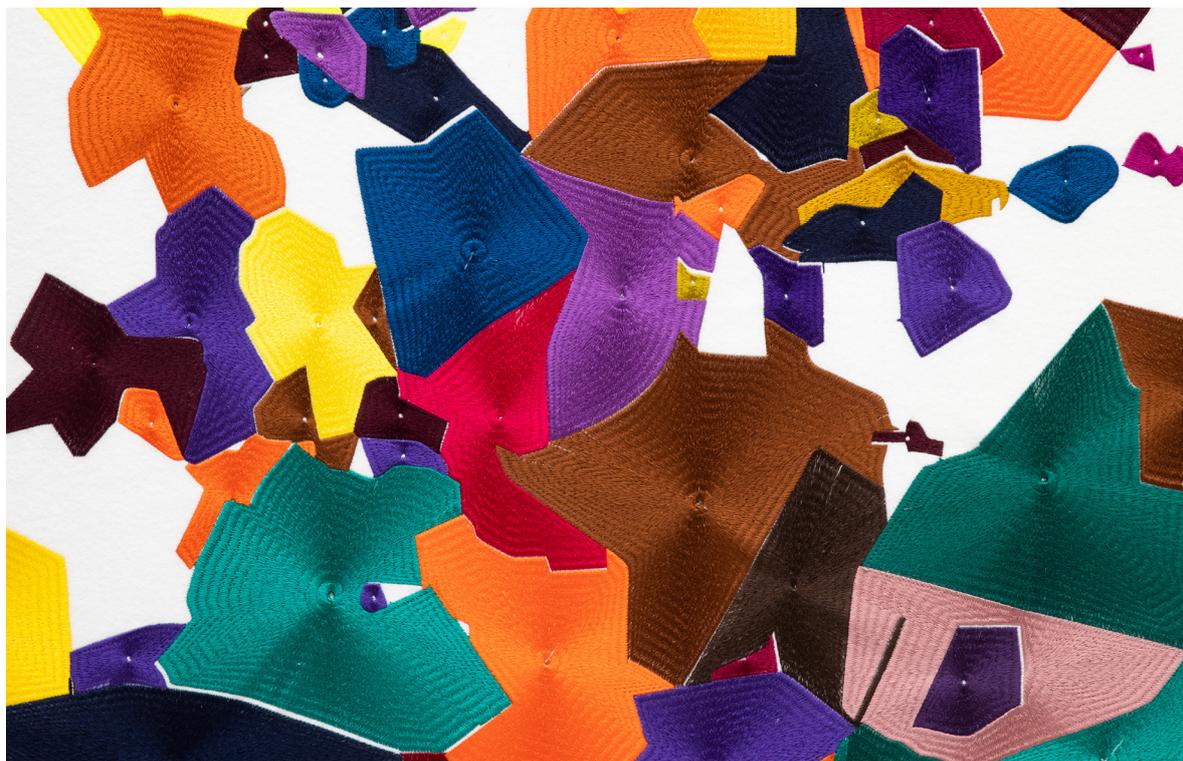


José María Sicilia

Suspendu à un fil

February 11 — March 25, 2023



José María Sicilia, *Accident*, 2022 (detail). Photo: Jayun Deng — Galerie Chantal Crousel.
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Forty years after the beginning of a precious collaboration, Galerie Chantal Crousel is pleased to welcome the ninth solo exhibition of José María Sicilia. In his recent works, he pursues his translation of sensitive and sublime phenomena into graphic representations. Deepening his research on the manifestations of light, the apprehension of time, and the translation of the non-visual and of oral storytelling traditions in his works, he transcribes them by exploring the technique of embroidery, characteristic of his recent work.

José María Sicilia is a leading figure of a new Spanish painting movement that emerged in the 1980s. He is one of a young generation of artists interested in materiality in painting. His early paintings—in oil painting and wax on wood—invite the viewer to experience a slow plunge into the material, while challenging him to see beyond representation.

In his recent series, silk becomes the main material. Between depth and surface, absorption and reflection of light, it captures the invisible, the ephemeral, the intangible, through the threads that render the richness and diversity of what escapes vision. Thus, silk, whose moiré effect is both transparent and opaque, allows the artist to reveal and conceal the immateriality of the forces that surround us and run through us.

The oscillation between unveiling and concealing runs through all the works presented in the exhibition. Consisting of a superposition of silk panels embroidered with lines and shapes, they are an attempt to translate sensitive but non-visible phenomena into visual and two-dimensional works. Thus, the artist graphically translates the song of birds in the series *El Instante*, the undulatory nature of light following Thomas Young's experiment in 1801 in *Ninfosis*, the functioning of vision in *Lucciola*, the seismic waves of Fukushima in *Accident*, the multiple and ancestral voice of the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights* in *Raconte-toi*.

However, this translation is not a representation as can be a sonogram, a scientific diagram, a biological drawing or a graph, which are the sources of his work. By a complex process of translation of the invisible into visible, of the immaterial into material, of the ephemeral instant (of a tremor, a song, a flash of light) into a durable image fixed by the threads of his paintings, Sicilia creates a new language. The figure of the artist is no longer that of the demiurge but of the passer of images. In the manner of a Rimbaudian poet, he builds a world of synesthesia where one meaning is transferred to another, one language to another. To accomplish this metamorphosis, the artist uses both poetry (that of the *Thousand and One Nights*, of the beauty he finds in nature or in Pier Paolo Pasolini's films), and science (that of physicist Thomas Young, ornithology researchers at Cornell University, seismologists who studied the Fukushima tsunami).

He also resorts to the ancestral technique of embroidery (traditionally used to inscribe initials, floral motifs or abstract ornaments) and calligraphy, as well as to the digital and technological tools of data collection and study. The artist decodes a world that is naturally inaccessible to us and encodes the information into a poetic and artistic language of his own, which allows us to approach them visually, without being able to fully grasp them.

His translation is finally not a transfer but rather a transformation of a unique and transient phenomenon into a particular universe, contained in an image, which preserves the memory of it. The artist lets himself be taken by this process of perpetual metamorphosis. By resorting to a plastic vocabulary in constant mutation and to the appropriation of motifs across different times and civilizations, he reinvents his plastic and technical language (from the early wax paintings to the silk threads tracing computer drawings), and he thus reinvents the figure of the artist.

In order to carry out this translation-transformation, José María Sicilia appropriates existing images: scientific graphics, images found in popular culture or images taken from the films by Pier Paolo Pasolini. All of them represent a moment, subtracted from the duration of a linear sequence.

Like Pasolini, José María Sicilia is fascinated by fireflies (*luciola*), which give their name to one of the series in this exhibition. For the artist, they are one of the most astonishing manifestations of the birth and dispersion of light, but also of its fleeting, intermittent nature, just like the barely perceptible moment, just like the song of a bird that settles for a moment on a branch before flying away again, just like a tremor that suspends time in a flash. All of this is only an image, only "the passing light which crosses, like a comet, the immobility of any horizon"¹.

It is this moment, this image—ephemeral and in movement—that the artist is interested in. Far from trying to freeze the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights* in a definitive interpretation, he affixes various images that flit from one page to another, that run across the pages like shooting stars. By juxtaposing these moments, the artist does not seek to reconstruct a duration, but by combining them, by "agglutinating"² them, to create a new perception of time.

The combination of different visual universes and a text itself coming from an ancient and recent, oriental and occidental, collective creation leads us to understand his intervention not as a current illustration of words from the past, but as a will to engage in a conversation transcending time, or even a constantly renewed poetic meditation.

1. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles*, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2009, p.101.

2. João Fernandes identifies in José María Sicilia's works "a morphologic process of agglutination that replaces the traditional process of juxtaposition that has always been the hallmark of collage throughout the history of art". João Fernandes, "Translation and metamorphosis: José María Sicilia, the artist and the task of the translator", in *José María Sicilia : La Locura del Ver*, La Moneda, 2017, p.12.

Between diffraction and refraction, between volume and silence, between instant and duration, between immobility and movement, the forms that José María Sicilia embroiders on his canvases make the surface of the works vibrate with ephemeral and invisible phenomena which the artist tries to fix in an original language of his own. Thus, in their very abstraction, the canvases and works on paper overflow with a vitality and organic growth, as the title of one of his latest series, *Ninfosis*³, indicates.

It is by transforming—through a complex process of translations—the sensitive information of a world that is inaccessible to us that José María Sicilia pursues his quest for the sublime.

3. *Ninfosis* describes the process of transformation of an insect into a pupa.

José María Sicilia

Born in 1954 in Madrid, Spain.

José María Sicilia has always been deeply sensitive to nature and has devoted much of his career to question immaterial space between art and life, between Eros and Thanatos. Beyond their immediate and disturbing beauty, the works of José María Sicilia transpose us in frontier territories, where the familiar becomes strange and where memory is "mise en abîme".

His work has been shown internationally in many collective exhibitions including in the Kranenburgh Museum, Bergen (2018); Museo Casa de la Moneda, Madrid (2017); Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid (2016); Musée Delacroix, Paris (2015); Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz (2014); Matadero Madrid, Madrid (2013); Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art, Fukushima (2013); Santa Caridad, Sevilla (2012); Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki (2010).

José María Sicilia's works are featured in important public and private collections across Europe, the USA and Asia, including: M+, Hong Kong, China; CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain; Banco de España collection, Madrid, Spain; Caixa Collection, Barcelona, Spain; Institute Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia, Spain; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA and the Cincinnati Art Museum, OH, USA, among others.