

Hi Mario,

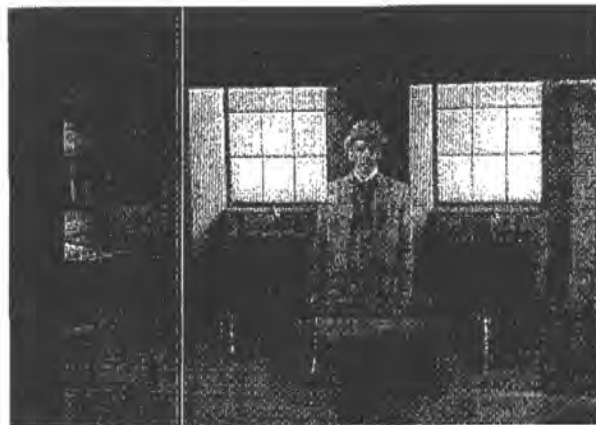
The other day I stumbled upon a movie from 1955 that made me think of you and your work for quite a while. It is a film within a film titled *Three Cases of Murder* consisting of three autonomous chapters. The first, "In the Picture," is about a mysterious painting located in a museum gallery. It's a slightly distorted, late-romantic English landscape, with a dilapidated house at its center. It's a decent painting, especially considering that most fictional masterpieces in films are not very believable. The landscape is desolate but, from time to time, its author (the painter, who lives with his wife in the house inside the painting) comes out of the picture, breaks the protective glass, and wanders about the museum galleries. He is, in fact, a consummate thief; in each of his outings he steals something from the museum in order to decorate his ruin of a home, leaving the museum increasingly depleted. His thievery is such that he also abducts museum visitors and holds them captive inside the painting. These poor art lovers will never see the light of day again, for he makes them disappear. I wonder if this story sounds familiar to you?

Thinking of many of your works, it seems to me that this film's story might not be so fictional, so impossible. Though I can't make up my mind about whether you'd be the artist who escapes from the work, the museum visitor trapped inside it, or both.

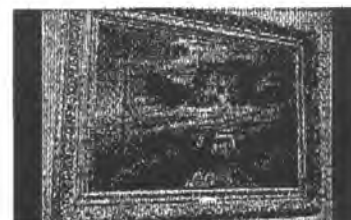
MENSAJE 1

Hola Mario,

El otro día me encontré con una película que me hizo pensar en ti, o en tu trabajo, o las dos cosas mezcladas, durante un buen rato. Era una película dentro de otra titulada *Three Cases of Murder*, rodada en 1955, compuesta de tres capítulos autónomos. El primero, "In the Picture", habla de un misterioso cuadro en un museo: un paisaje inglés, romántico tardío—una obra bastante pasable sobre todo si pensamos que las obras maestras ficticias que aparecen en el cine suelen ser poco creíbles—un paisaje romántico, ligeramente distorsionado, con una casa en ruinas en el centro. El cuadro está despoblado, no hay personajes, pero de tanto en tanto el autor, que vive con su esposa en esa casa, ocultos, sale del cuadro rompiendo el cristal protector y se da un paseo por las galerías del museo. El artista es un ladrón consumado, y siempre que sale se roba algo del museo para decorar su casa, con lo cual el museo está cada día más vacío. Es tan ladrón que también se roba visitantes, a los que abduce dentro del cuadro, donde los mantiene secuestrados y finalmente los hace desaparecer. Esos pobres amantes del arte no vuelven nunca a ver el mundo, desaparecen en la obra. Me preguntaba si esta historia no te es algo familiar...



Pienso en muchas piezas tuyas y se me hace que la historia del filme quizá no sea tan ficticia, tan imposible. Aunque me cuesta decidir si tu caso es el del artista que escapa de la obra o del visitante del museo secuestrado en ella. O los dos.

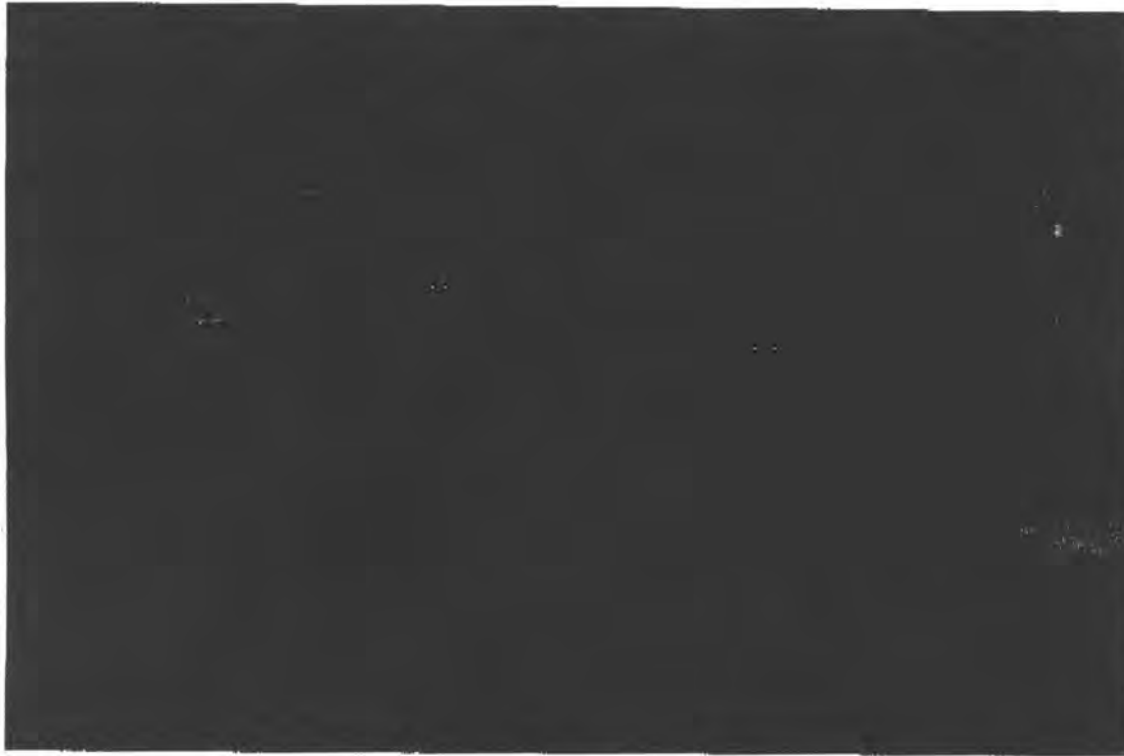




Thomas Gainsborough's *Conversation in a Park* -dated 1745- is a small and early work by the English painter which depicts a young woman sitting on a bench next to a young man. The iconography on this conversation piece is fairly simple and typical of the time, and shows the dominant impact of French art in the England art circles in the early 1700's. The genre, with its outdoor settings is characteristic of the time and place, as well as a typical Gainsborough depiction which would differ from the french interior paintings.

The man, who has a book on his hand, might as well be a young aristocrat (although less than a century later, the piece was described in a sale as a self portrait of the painter with

his soon-to-be wife Margaret) and is evidently in the midst of courting his companion. The scene clearly evokes works by the French Antoine Watteau, however, the young people depicted seem somewhat stiff, far from looking like actual living souls. The picture brings together conventional aspects of seduction scenes, which at the time existed both as fact and as painted fiction.



Gainsborough's talent for landscape painting, who at the time was making a name for himself very quickly in London, is apparent here in the romantic wooded background that frames the scene which is completed with an Arcadian temple in the background. The genre, which allowed group portraits and was mainly a response to the renewal of English artistic and cultural life in the eighteenth century, took up much of the artist's lifetime. Gainsborough's technique consisted of applying colors in one simple layer; he also mixed his paints with more oil than was usual, increasing thereby the luminosity of the canvas. The painter's fame escalated as his career developed and painted his first portraits of the royal family in 1777. In 1783 he was one of the founding members of the Royal Academy in England. Gainsborough was born in Suffolk in 1727 and died in London in 1788.

Conversation in a Park is an oil on canvas which measures 73 cm. high and 68 cm. wide. It entered the collection of the Louvre Museum -which began to acquire English works in the late 19th century- as a gift of the French buisnes man and founding member of the Action Comitee for the European Union Pierre Bordeaux-Groult in 1952. *Conversation in a Park* is currently on display in the English Painting section of the museum. It is hanged in a small 150 cm. wide partition wall that sticks out of the main large wall in the room. It is accompanied by 11 other paintings by William Turner and John Constable, among others. The painting's back has two eyebolts which are attached to an easy-huck-up system attached to the top part of the wall. The English Paintings section in the Louvre is located at the end of the museum's Denon wing, on the 1st floor.

True; a photographer could show up at any moment and make things more complicated. Even better: the artist thief could steal a camera and cause a true dimensional catastrophe. I'm assuming, though, that we are not speaking about photography, but about entering and exiting an image—getting trapped or taking shelter in it, even if it's a mere document. As if paintings could have a diorama syndrome, or a world syndrome, and the other way around.



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ES VERDAD, PODRÍA APROVECHAR UN FOTÓGRAFO EN CUALQUIER MOMENTO DE LA PELÍCULA Y COMPLICAR EL ASUNTO. AÓN MEJOR: EL ARTISTA LA DROÓN PODRÍA ROBAR UNA CÁMARA FOTOGRÁFICA Y PASARLA EN UN VÍDEO/VIDEO OCASIONE DI- MENSIONAL. PERO ASUMO QUE NO ESTAMOS HABLANDO DE FOTOGRAFÍA SINO DE ENTRAR Y SALIR DE UNA IMAGEN—Y DE QUEDAR ATRAPADOS EN ELLA, O REFUGIADOS— INCLUSO SI ES UN MERO DOCUMENTO— CUADROS QUE TIENEN SÍNDROME DE DIORAMA! QUE TIENEN SÍNDROME DE MUNDO, PERO TAMBIÉN AL REVÉS.

I like the idea of taking refuge in an image. The last piece I showed somehow alluded to this. It was a video clip, produced in pop language, in which a character takes shelter inside a cave. It is both a metaphorical and physical cave that turns into a stage as soon as the character starts singing a song I wrote (a sort of manifesto on the act of showing). The refuge becomes a mirror of the exhibition.

Me gusta la idea de refugiarse en una imagen. La ultima pieza que presente de alguna manera aludia a eso. Es en realidad un video clip, producido con un lenguaje muy pop en el cual un personaje toma como refugio una cueva, ambas; metaforicamente y tambien en la realidad, y en cuanto empieza a cantar (una cancion que escribi y es un tipo de manifiesto sobre el acto de exhibir) se convierte en un escenario. El refugio como espejo de la exhibicion.



Mario,

I can't help but to think of the image as a cave—a see-through cave.

Just yesterday I saw one of your pieces at a museum—the *Open Letter to Dr. Atl* video, in which the frame moves across one side of the landscape to the other while the subtitles slowly filter your letter to the Mexican artist. Precisely because of the faxes we've been sending each other these days, I couldn't resist imagining you looking at the paintings of Gerardo Murillo, aka Dr. Atl, in search for a way into them—maybe to break open time's lock and talk to Atl, to open a territory where the idea of an epistolary exchange becomes possible. Perhaps the image already is that. The video-letter "works" because it is public, it is being exhibited, and also because you aren't there.

Your idea of turning the cave into a stage inside a video that already is the cave, on a stage that is the gallery, and which includes a reflection on the act of showing—that idea in itself is cavernous, with tunnels connecting ideas and concepts.

The magic spell might break if you were the singer or if you were present in the image. I'm thinking of those works of yours that are inhabited by your different alter egos (sometimes only a voice). Talk to me about the figure, or function, of the alter ego.

MARIO,

No puedo evitar pensar en la imagen como cueva—una cueva diáfana.

Precisamente ayer volvía del museo de ver uno de tus trabajos, uno de mis favoritos, esa *Carta Abierta al Dr Atl* en que la imagen va de un lado a otro del paisaje mientras los subtítulos van filtrando tu carta línea a línea.

Precisamente por esta conversación que estamos teniendo estos días, no pude evitar imaginarte mirando los cuadros de Murillo-Atl en busca de una manera de penetrar en ellos—quizá no penetrar, sino abrir su candado de tiempo, hablar con Atl, o abrir un territorio en que la idea misma de la carta es posible. Pero quizá la imagen ya sea eso. Entonces, el video-carta abierta "funciona" porque es pública, porque se está exhibiendo, y también porque tú no estás ahí.

Tu idea de hacer de la cueva un escenario, dentro de un video que es ya la cueva, que está en un escenario que es la galería, e incluyendo una reflexión sobre el mostrar o exponer, es ella misma casi cavernosa, con túneles que comunican unos conceptos con otros.

Quizá si tú fueses el cantante, si tú estuvieses presente en la imagen, se rompería la magia. Pienso en las obras tuyas que están habitadas por alter-egos de distinto relieve (a veces sólo una voz). Me gustaría que me hablastes de esa figura, o esa función, el alter-ego.

PS: ME ACORDE DE LA FRASE DE SMITHSON:
"VISITING A MUSEUM IS A MATTER OF
GOING FROM VOID TO VOID"

Once, in conversation with Annemarie Sauzeau, we started talking about Alighiero Boetti's piece *Twins*. She said that to make the image, Boetti first took a photo of himself, then showered and washed his hair, and then went back to take the second photo. I found it interesting that something so commonplace would immediately turn him into another person.

Recuerdo que en algún momento platicando con Anne Marie Sauzeau salió a la plástica la foto 'Twins' de A.B. y me pareció interesante que decía que para hacer la foto lo que hizo A.B. fue tomarse la primera foto, luego irse a bañar y lavar el pelo y luego regresar y tomarse la segunda foto. Pense que era interesante que algo tan doméstico nos volviera otra persona en lo inmediato.

CHARACTERS

ALLEN SMITHEE

A filmmaker, pseudonym of a filmmaker,
actor, artist, story, script, argument.

