

The ascent of the river begins at night. The course is motorless, rowing against the wind. I only feel and smell. My hands slide through the turbulent waters. I touch weeds in thick, dense, swampy water. I exhale vapours that choke me in the gloom. Vapours shed by the foliage that I sense, menacing, on either shore. I'm scraped as well by jagged rocks, pointed like daggers.

The nights advance slowly on board the vessel. I'm frightened; in panic. I feel my eyelashes flutter. My body is numb with dread. My palate is bone dry. My stomach and intestines pulse. I don't even feel my heart, it beats so hard. My ears are red, shredded by the cold. My nostrils are dilated even more than my silent pupils. And, with the trembling of panic, there is an incomprehensible feeling of excitement.

With a purified soul, and a well-drained inner eye, I set foot on *terra firma* for the first time. Muddy, high-mountain ground. Always by night, for light is no guest at this latitude. Such trembling! Finally, I distinguish figures in the gloom. The muscles of my third eye contract at the Dantesque spectacle. An immense collection of biomorphic totems accumulate on a broad lunar-like plain. Tens of hundreds. Thousands. Forms never seen before. Muscular rubble, clumsily modelled by the violence of inhospitable surroundings. They resemble clumps of mud lumped together by an infant, but without innocence. And they are a brilliant gold that leaves me dazzled. A strident light born of the stone that no sun illuminates.

A single form seems to rise up at the end of the coastline. A blood-curdling, floating form. It looks like a meteorite, a few metres off the ground. An irregular egg suspended tensely over the atmosphere. Something radiates from behind it. It looks like sparks of fire, survivors in a lunar evening. It is the first light I glimpse in this dishevelled ascension. Its reflection calms me: hundreds of islands emerge on the dawn's horizon.

That was it! We needed to reach the summit to glimpse, behind the jungle, the totems, and vapours, this inception of a glowing dawn, that reveals what I had so desired: the unknown islands in the never-navigated sea. I sit, and I discern. All the nerves in my body unwind. My soul, finally, reconciles itself with my flesh. The lids of my real eyes finally open. The humid glance is lost in those remote islands. They are God's islands, never trodden by humans. Only the cry of the volcanic islands reverberates. Some of them are still smoking. They are the sudden eruptions of marine volcanoes. They expel toxins from the depths of the sea. Is there a message in their smoke? No message will serve. I have it all. I have nothing. The vertigo of no place.

[A. M.]

Jordi Fulla

Anatomy of an island with closed eyes

MUSEUM OF MONTSERRAT. FROM APRIL 8 TO SEPTEMBER 11, 2017

"Il faut oser de faire le silence"

Byung-Chul Han sustains that knowledge is a patient expedition towards silence. A negative path, against the grain of our always affirmative and hurried civilization. A path travelled groping in the dark, with no prefabricated destination. A road taken by thinkers, hermits and creators since the dawn of time. Some have ventured down, free-falling through the elliptic circles of hell. Some have been more inclined to ascend, seeking luminous rewards at the summit. Others prefer horizontal movement, through the mists and dangers of the jungle. And some have opted for a vertical descent, like a miner, hoping to find aqueous veins in the depths of the continent.

A year ago, Jordi Fulla decided to set out on a voyage of this nature. An initiatory, spiritual diver's plunge. A voyage in search of unknown forms that illuminate the spirit, in the heart of darkness. The writer of these lines accompanied the artist on his trip, as a loyal travelling companion. For twelve months, we exchanged letters, writings, aphorisms, images, films and drawings; an irregular, intuitive epistolary where we followed every lead in his artistic corpus: his obsessions and desires, his deepest painterly, philosophical, and literary concerns... Kaleidoscopic material, that has served as undergrowth for the painter, in his preparation for a risky, profound and ambitious project.

To begin with, there was the Orient. We were united by the need to take on an artistic project that sought to resolve the crossovers between East and West. Jordi Fulla's trip to Japan in November 2016 was the start of this expedition. It was his second trip to the island of the rising sun, ten years after his first. Jordi Fulla is an artist with a Western shell, who is fascinated by the Oriental gaze. His Western eye drives him, as an artist, to calculate, trace, emulate, measure, reproduce, chart, fill and alter. His oriental eye, on the other hand, drives him to empty out, suggest, idle and blend with a nature that has always fascinated him from a distance, through a lens. The middle point between two cultural latitudes often finds Jordi Fulla in pursuit of so-called floating worlds: indeterminate locations, without time or space, that freeze a physical instant - a natural accident, a curiosity of nature - on an indefinite stage. It's what he himself has described as the fifth season of painting, a dimension *hors du temps* that

draws both from the Japanese Zen artistic tradition - Ukiyo-e prints, the gardens of Kyoto, the photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto - and the serenity of a branch of Western art: from Vermeer to Magritte, Klein to Anish Kapoor.

Afterwards came the islands. A strange fascination has driven the artist, on different occasions, to want to capture these floating entities: cold islands (*icebergs*) and warm ones (the volcanic islands of Japan); human islands (dry-stone huts) or oceanic islands (those charted in *Islands*). On this trip, however, we've endeavoured to approach islands of the spirit. Islands as a source of knowledge and mystery, that populate the imaginations of both the West - from Thomas More's *Utopia* to Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead* - and the East, from Hokusai's engravings to the films of Kaneto Shindo. The island as a lure or snare to undertake our voyage, and allow whatever they dictate to flow. Ambiguous bodies that manage to trap a sensation at the peak of natural spontaneity. This point of tension between artifice and nature, darkness and light, reality and abstraction, is one of the constants in the work of Jordi Fulla which he has sought, in this project, to expand into its maximum expression.

And, finally, night. All believers, all mystics seeking the infallible know, like the artist, that to reach illumination you need to follow a steep path, full of dangers and shadows. They know that a path without darkness is not to be trusted. Jordi Fulla has undertaken this voyage in a (not always voluntary) state of blindness. An arduous path, groping in the darkness to which his eyes have adjusted in order to encounter the unfathomable forms that populate any spiritual descent: unknown, ambiguous, strange, extraordinary forms that are, as a result, terrifying, like the beauty Rilke described in the contemplation of the angel, or T. S. Elliot in his description of the wasteland of an England devastated by the First World War. The path to beauty is not the pleasant stroll that our technocratic world attempts to sell us. Profound beauty always has a tragic underbelly that calls for a bravery to confront and transmit it. This noble tragedy in the form of islands, totems, volcanoes, meteorites, Buddhas or interior seas is what Jordi Fulla, with all his impulses and dedication, has endeavoured to capture with closed eyes.

Albert Mercadé