HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF THE NOT-KNOWN

By historiography we mean the set of techniques and research methods used to describe events that happened and were recorded in the past; or to put it another way, the faithful construction of a written account of history, for the purpose of providing accurate knowledge, safe from subjective or questionable interpretations. To achieve that, historiography depends on the proper use of the historical method – exploring the sources and applying critical validation before reconstructing the past – and also on the scientific method – seeking confidence-inspiring data by using trustworthy instruments – in order to contribute valid conclusions that will then become part of a version of history that is generally accepted and thus becomes the truth.

If we try to apply those methods of study to the sphere of fiction or fantasy, we run into the need to make the events recounted truthful and credible, so that they become acceptable as possible events. The success of that voluntary decoupling from reality that is often entailed in a fictional account – a decoupling that the work’s recipients are in fact seeking – depends wholly on appropriate links of some kind being formed with what is known and generally accepted. That necessary balance between what is or could be real, and what is not and could not be lies behind the power of genres that require some degree of historical authenticity (or pseudo-historical authenticity at least), such as fantasy literature or even science fiction. Something that, beyond explicit falsehoods and innocent entertainment, facilitates accepting identification with what is recounted, and thus invites taking new approaches to reality aimed at influencing our ways of understanding or reconsidering what we see around us, what concerns us, or simply what defines us. A speculative distancing with regard to that reality and its limits which, on the basis of the supposed flexibility of the imaginary, manages to undermine what seemed sure and to embrace non-standard interpretations of it.

A strict dialogue between what we recognise as false and the credible building of the possibility (however remote) of its existence. Therein lies the great contribution of those productions that, as they hover between reality and fiction, offer us a conceptual extra, insofar as cracks and weak points emerge that can question or makes us speculate on what we had regarded as impossible. Consider, for example, mythical instances in popular culture, such as the confusion and panic sparked off in 1938 by Orson Welles’ radio adaptation of H. G. Wells’ The War of the Worlds (1898), or the stifling control of technology over man as portrayed by Stanley Kubrick in 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), or the querying of reality that the Wachoski brothers present us with in The Matrix (1999).

In this respect, though in the field of art, the work of Momu & No Es is at home with those same parameters of reality-fiction, and thus incorporates that extra sense of complicity and empathy for/with its recipients that we mentioned in the previous examples. It is a narrative of their own, brimming over with secondary sub-stories that spring directly from everyday settings to speculate on what is real, and to turn us into participants in a word that looks inviting but that is shot
through with doubts, mysteries and questions on the functionality of artistic practice. A constant, obsessive and frantic working method whose main instrument of discourse is Momu & No Es’ capacity to draw out supposedly hidden aspects lying within the ordinary and the humdrum. In short, an array of resources (both formal and reflective) that consciously pushes the consequences of those aspects to their limits through the artists’ insistence on their importance and unshakeable belief in their validity.

To show their work at Espai Montcada, Momu & No Es are offering their 1979-1982. The Elf Wars, a new installation that calls attention to a forgotten fragment in our collective memory through turning to a range of presentation registers that include text, sculpture, and video as well as the performance element. A long process of investigation, formalised through salvaging a whole string of events that occurred chronologically between those two dates. An obscure, little-known period that is deliberately revealed to us only on the day of the opening, which is when the exhibition room shows the most decisive, defining aspects of that time. A wide-ranging display based on a historiographical analysis of unknown events with the intention of providing the framework of knowledge needed to understand what really happened between 1979 and 1982.

In that respect, 1979-1982. The Elf Wars reproduces the distinctive working process that characterises the work and the career of Momu & No Es. The initial onset of an idea or event, seemingly of little importance (almost minimal), and the enthusiastic and critical edification of all the machinery needed to validate it. Such starting points were already there in previous works by these artists, such as Mi dispiace (2005), a narrative built on the trivial incident of finding an abandoned suitcase in Rome; El ajo ganador (2006), a video that reproduces a delirious competition between cloves of garlic seeking the privilege of being singled out to die; and La Reina de las Fiestas (2007), a field-work project on social recognition, in which the artists extrapolate their interests to the local festivities staged in a little village in the district of Palencia. Laden with alternative readings and subtle nods to the gallery, in this present work those elements take on a new and formidable power.

Hence 1979-1982. The Elf Wars amounts to the public presentation of an unknown period that Momu & No Es draw attention to and reinstate, through their total faith in its existence – a faith that springs directly from the artists and spreads to all the actors involved in the project (the curator, the institution, the designer, the external contributors etc.) and that offers, in a critical, engaged way, the first full study on what went on over the three years of the Elf Wars. For us it proved to be an intense, rich and stimulating endeavour. Having attained the goal, we simply hope that its recipients now, from their distance and unaware of the events, will feel the same way about it.