

**From where there is no return.
[The poetics of the journey in Cristóbal Toral's oeuvre].**

Fernando Castro Flórez.

“In that silent solitude, surrounded by pictures, I began to feel that it was all very odd, that life was as odd as it was mysterious. Even the fact I was a painter seemed very strange compared to my simple and bucolic life in the countryside. Even today, after all these years, when I think about it, being a painter, devoting my whole life to painting still seems very odd”¹.

According to Gombrich, *illusion* is a process that not only operates in visual representation but in all sensory perception and is absolutely crucial to any organism's possibilities of survival. The object of vision is shaped from deliberate attention to a selective set of signs that can be grouped together in perceptions endowed with meaning. In short, the similarity of images (the objects represented) to real objects, which is central to any theory on pictorial realism, is transferred from representation to the judgement of the viewer - a circular argument which, as Joel Snyder pointed out, requires (culturally defined) "standards of truth". This would amount to accepting a pictorial theory of vision, as Alberti did in his classical treatise *On Painting*. The idea of *truth* is contained in what Gadamer calls the *prejudicial structure of understanding*, a play of interpretations in which “forms of life” are shaped. “The disintegration of the sign, which seems to be the major issue of modernity, is indeed present in realist undertakings, but in a rather regressive manner, as it operates in the name of referential plenitude, whereas today the opposite is true, it is a case of emptying the sign and making its object move back infinitely until the age-old aesthetic of ‘representation’ is radically called into question”². We should bear in mind that *description*, in a contemporary sense, means copying that which is already copied, a path between simulacra and the vertiginous expansion of photographic cartography, of the impulse to “capture the moment”. “Any literary description”, notes Barthes, “is a *view*. It would be said that the speaker, before describing, stands at the window, not so much to see but to establish what he sees by its very frame: the window frame creates the scene. To describe is thus to place the empty frame that the realist author always carries around with him (more important than his easel) before a collection or a continuum of objects which cannot be put into words without this obsessive operation (which could be laughable as a gag); in order to speak about it the writer, through this initial rite, first transforms the ‘real’ into a painted [*peint*] (framed) object, having done this he can take down that object, remove it from his picture; in short, to depict [*dépeindre*] is to unroll the carpet of the codes, to refer not from a language to a referent but from one code to another.

1 Cristóbal Toral: *La vida en una maleta. Autorretrato de un pintor*, Ed. Temas de Hoy, Madrid, 2003, p. 273.

2 Roland Barthes: “El efecto de realidad”, in *El susurro del lenguaje*, Ed. Paidós, Barcelona, 1987, p. 187.