

Paula Anta
Jaam rek (in peace)
Curator Nerea Ubieta
PhotoEspaña22
From 2nd June to 26th July 2022
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when chaos surrounds you
the wisest decision is to create
inner peace
Yung pueblo

TOWARDS THE INSIDE

Sand and light landscapes create an atmosphere of imperturbable calm. Little does it matter if nearby is the hustle and bustle of noisily visually polluted cities. No noise seems to exist in these gentle places, stopped in an earthy time which enables the flow of consciousness. They are African scenarios, mostly located in Senegal and Mauritania, where Paula has found the energy to make her vibrate to another frequency. At the beginning, she didn't even realize, a subtle drive took her to these destinations; however, through the years, an unavoidable yearning has been revealed. The photographs in the exhibition belong to different series, sharing the same emotional colour scheme and expressing the distinguishing features of her work: nature intervention, sculptural value of images, aesthetic purity, compositional accuracy or her conceptual character.

The first piece in chronological order is part of the project *Black routes*, made in 2011. Anta marks in black pigment trading and exchange routes which linked ancient metropolis, now in ruins. The artist talks about "remnants of forgotten in history cartographies, a kind of "anti-maps, vague and fractionated". Today every itinerary goes on and splits off endlessly. There's not even need to move to a corporal level, screen navigation is infinite, from window to window, from document to video, from link to website. We live connected and everything is traceable: identities, stories, data, conversations, even works of art, made into NFTs- display from its core a thorough origin. What would happen if, in the era of hyperlinks, there were loose ends, blocked routes or dead-end? Then, we would feel the need to stop, walk in circles, turn around and retrace our steps, stop looking outside and start redirecting our gaze to the inside. It strikes as paradoxical to think that, to find ourselves, first we should be able to get lost. Anta proposes suspended places, interrupted from their plot, but complete and inhabitable. It is possible to remain there unhurriedly and unrequested, to walk them with our imagination in order to detach ourselves from the egoic murmur and enjoy the privacy of silence. "We walk mainly to feel free from all obstacles, to leave ourselves behind rather than to free ourselves from others"

The use of the black pigment appears in the trilogy of projects that starts this series and then would come *L'architecture des Arbres y Edera*. Anta started to include it in her work inspired, to a great extent, by Pierre Soulages, the renowned painter of black. What's most striking about his dark monochromatic paintings is their purpose: to find the way to the light. The French artist handles and gives volume to dark matter, showing shades and turning it into something bright. From here on he understands it as a door to his own deep mental space:

" I like this violent colour inciting to internalization. My tool is no longer black, but this secret light coming up from black. Even more powerful in its effects since rising from the greatest absence of light."

Anta was looking for something similar taken to the field of photography. The choice of black has nothing to do with its symbolism, but with the relationship it establishes with light, absorbing its radiation completely. Thus the artist creates

"a contradiction between reality's existence and disappearance through the nature of the photographic means and the phenomenon that makes it exist. Black marks, covers, highlights spaces and, above all, makes some elements disappear to favour the splendor of others. From a sensory perspective it lets your eyes rest in the no-colour: it moves to calmness, to the significant field Soulages talks about. On this point, if there is a par excellence scenario to provide an in-depth look it is the desert. Associated to the internal situation of the individual, many religions and cultures have wanted to see in its representation the existential void and loneliness; but also the calm of meditation. In her unpublished work "Dune" Anta creates almost pictorially an image in which her black lines come together with those natural furrows and steps

in the sand. The composition is closed with the presence of a solitary tree, stronghold of shadow and opportunity for physical and reflexive relief. It is known that Buda found enlightenment after weeks of meditation under a fig tree. Sitting and breathing looks easy, although nowadays it is an achievement.

“Most of us have managed to banish from our consciousness the look that inspires and accepts in the plenitude of everything that exists and, when exhaling, gives off the most sublime beauty”.¹

The steps around the tree lead us to the photograph in which some footprints are cut off in the middle of the way. It is part of *Khorom*, a series of saline skylines that send us to the free trip of the look in communion with the landscape. The artist reflects on the link set between the scenarios and thought full of experiences. Contemplation “guarantees a trip: suggests our consciousness a way out of its destination, but also out of our body, the place where it comes from”. Actually, the interesting thing is joining both shifts. Bringing the landscape inwards, projecting ourselves in its vastness to come back to ourselves. Hence the steps return: there is no need to go anywhere, we are there. Being aware of that contributes to a happiness different from that of the senses, a contentment that comes from being in peace and connecting to the origin of our existence. The set of photographs in small format *Maa ngée*, of mangroves in Senegal, takes us to the same place through the calm waters as a symbol of tranquility. The sober limit in the distance is broken in the haze of *Hendu*, where invisibility refers to a double metaphor; on the one side, the ignorance of the harsh context in these countries, on the other, to the turbid mind whose natural state tends to the dissipation of noise. The statism in the photograph lets us silence the strength of a moving car engine, used as the tool to get the perfect shot. The outside buzz is silenced by the intimate gesture with the camera.

An unanswered question overflies: how to stop the thinking when it gets excited? The possibility exists to establish an anchor, an unchanging place to return to.

In the landscapes of her most recent work, on the beaches of the Seleganese coast, dunes and water go hand in hand. Some vertical structures-made of plastic, branches and debris- are the stars of the images, giving their title (in wolog language) to the series *Khamekaye*. On a practical level, they are landmarks intended for the fishermen, placed along the shore to signal the position of the villages inland; however, they also have an aesthetic and formal intention that makes them real sculptures. Made of a mixture of rubbish and primitive materials, the pieces raise like majestic totems of everyday creativity. The artist makes her own, in an act that combines culture and nature, making it impossible for us to see the difference with the original ones. In the context of the show, the *Khamekaye* work as a sort of allegorical signals that guide the individual to their inner hamlet. That sheltered place where to come back. The works in the exhibition mark an introspective movement: from noise to calm, from black to white, from darkness to light, from the outside to the inside. Paula Anta invites the viewer to dive in the vital flow to approach a state, *Jaam rek*, which means “ at peace”.

Nerea Ubieto

Paula Anta (Madrid, 1977) has made solo and collective exhibitions in institutions such as Tabacalera, CA2M, Matadero, Real Jardín Botánico, Museo del Traje, Centro de Arte de Alcobendas, Círculo de Bellas Artes, Casa de América, Academia de San Fernando, among others and has received important prizes like XI Bienal Internacional de Fotografía Contemporánea Pilar Citoler Award (2021), Photographer of the month Award ITSLIQUID (2021), Fotografía Contemporánea Consell de Mallorca Award (2020), Centro Unesco de Extremadura International Award (2020), Kells Collection Award (2019), Estampa Award de la Comunidad de Madrid (2016) or Fundación AENA Award (2010).

¹ TORRES, Sergi. *¿Me acompañas? Una invitación a despertar*. Ed.Urano. Madrid, 2017. P.101