



ARTUR RAMON ESPAI D'ART

## **Natura Sacra**

*Our Surroundings* by Jordi Ortiz dialogues with Artur Ramon Art works

10.11.22 - 22.12.22



Jordi Ortiz, *L'entorn. Cel #4*. 2016 – 2018. El Farró, Barcelona.  
UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 47 x 70 cm.



Jordi Ortiz, *L'entorn. Mar #3*. 2016 – 2018. Estuary of the Besòs river in the Mediterranean Sea, Barcelona.  
UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 47 x 70 cm.

## Sacred Nature

Victoria Cirlot

‘Stop, wave!’ is what we seem to hear as we contemplate one of the twenty-four photographs by Jordi Ortiz brought together under the title *L'Entorn*, ‘that which surrounds us’, ‘that which is given us’: sea, forest, rock, sky. Everything is halted in these images, as if everything were itself stone: the leaves on the branches, immobile, nothing stirring them; the clouds in the sky, immobile, as if they had never passed across the vault, slowly or swiftly. But it is the crashing and roaring waves that alert us to the fact that all around us here is as petrified as the rocks. These photographs on 23.75-carat Rosenoble gold leaf show an environment, a setting that is nature. The photographer’s camera has captured the moment, and the gold has rendered it eternal. In our western tradition, specifically in a medieval Europe in constant contact with Byzantium, the light identified with the divinity has been made visible in painting with gold. Gold for the background, gold for the vestments of the saints, gold for their holy aureolae. Thus, when we look at these photographs we remember, and as we remember, the sense of the sacred returns, and with it we wonder how it is that we had never seen the light of the waves before, nor the light of the trees, nor the light of the rocks. *Stop, dead cierzo*. It is necessary to stop to contemplate these images in all their power and comprehend through them that nature has been transfigured here.

The gold background in Byzantine icons or in Western Gothic painting, symbolic representation of the theology of light deployed by the Fathers of the Church, placed the figures represented, saints and martyrs, in another dimension, different from the earthly, by abolishing all spatial and temporal reference. The hieratic nature of the figures represented, in whose faces almost no trace of humanity could be discerned, denied to the viewer any identification, expelling us from the sphere of familiarity and placing us in the realm of the strange. But above all it was the gold that was to plunge us into

a state of fascination in which we should be unable to wrest our gaze from the image and in which the *tremendum* would invade our entire being. We are not dealing here with an aesthetic experience in which the spectator feels moved by beauty; rather it is the sacred that breaks through. I would never say that Ortiz’s photographs are ‘beautiful.’ It is not a question of a sublime nature, but of a sacred nature.

Nature, conceived as the work of God, could be a path to the beyond, a bridge between here and there, thus fulfilling the requirements of any symbolic object. The Franciscan spirituality of Saint Bonaventure, for example, embraces the notion –so dear to the Romantics– that nature is God’s other book. As with the Holy Scriptures, Nature had to be read, interpreted and deciphered. However, there was little opportunity to accord it a pictorial place, since the Renaissance focus on its imitation (*imitatio naturae*) prevented it from being incorporated in the dimension of the sacred without investing in it the pictorial procedures and strategies characteristic of sacred art. That said, there are illustrative examples of the tradition within which Jordi Ortiz’s photographs are situated. The history of art always offers exceptions to general trends, rare cases which anticipate the course of history, visionary foresights of what will not be until many centuries have passed, or simply solutions to the problems of representation somewhat different from those commonly imagined.

In the 1856 manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale de France that contains the lyrical, narrative and musical work of Guillaume de Machaut, from the years 1350 to 1356, we appreciate a particular sense of nature, strikingly new with respect to the past, as both the principal artist, known as the Master of The Cure of Ill Fortune (one of the *dits* or spoken poems of Guillaume de Machaut), and his two collaborators ‘grant importance to the empirical observation of nature and of the beings



Figure 1.

that dwell in it', in the words of François Avril. Folio 103r (Fig. 1) depicts a forest that surrounds a castle on the left. Indeed, almost the whole miniature is occupied by a group of trees that form a forest alive with animals—deer, hares—and bounded by a stream at the bottom. Here, the forest—the space of adventure and chivalric questing which Arthurian romance never actually describes but leaves as a mere 'idea'—takes on a remarkable forcefulness as it reveals itself in all its mystery. Probably the work of an assistant of the Master of The Cure of Ill Fortune, the background of this miniature, as in others from the same source, is also resolved in a manner 'rare' for the time and the place—Paris—in which it was painted: a spray

of golden leaves stand out from a blue ground and seem to compete with the leaves of the forest, endowed with the luminosity that pervades the lower parts of many of the treetops.

A forest bathed in gold is notable among the fantastic landscapes of Hercules Segers (Haarlem 1590 – The Hague 1630), a peculiar painter and engraver whose work has been considered an antecedent of the surrealist landscapes of Max Ernst or Josef Šíma, whose 'mysterious landscapes' were the subject of an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2017 (Fig. 2). In this small etching (10.3 x 9.1 cm), printed in black on cotton with a dark yellow ground (*Small Wooded Landscape with a Road and a House*, British Museum inv. N. 5524 and HB 35b of the Catalogue) the atmosphere seems to derive in equal measure from an orientalisising exoticism and the realms of fairy tale. Vincent Gille has seen Segers's strange landscapes as arising 'from sleep, as a work of the spirit, acting on and through the body, a sensation at once physical and psychic, like a dream movement, close to that of Novalis'. Oneirism and mystery seem here to be merely symptoms of something far deeper than the landscape seems to reveal and that is none other than the sacred sense of nature.

Few of Jordi Ortiz's photographs offer an overall vision of the image, be it sea or forest, rock or sky. What we have of the sea is the foam, and of the forest—some in their thickness very similar to those of an Albrecht Altdorfer—it is the leaves that



Jordi Ortiz, *L'entorn. Bosc #4*. 2016 – 2018. Torrent de l'Espinagosa road, Barcelona. UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 64 x 96 cm.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

entirely fill the visual screen; as for the sky, the clouds with their contrasting light and dark provide, by virtue of their particular aptitude, shapes and figures to be filled out by the spectator. Sometimes they form mountains that, of course, are celestial mountains. But it is the rocks that most intensely place us in front of a restricted field that, in its closeness to the formless, almost prevents their recognition. That in the twenty-first century a photographer should allow himself to create informal images is not at all surprising, after almost a century of the pictorial experimentation that we know as Informalism; indeed, nothing now should surprise the spectator. What is strange is a painting like the one by Mathieu Dubus (1590-1665), in which he conceived a destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah completely formless but for the figures that we almost have to intuit at the bottom right of the picture, which Jean-Claude Lebensztejn has claimed 'in fact [represent] the stains and cracks that can be seen on an old wall' (Fig. 3). Yes, it is the old wall of Leonardo's lesson, and that of the surrealism that seeks to activate the imagination to deny, precisely, the imitation of nature. In these photographs we see several old walls, but I don't think they seek to activate our imagination, nor to constitute themselves as the object of artistic creation itself. Rather, they are images that allow us to intuit the beginning, that formless mass from which everything emerged. Various textures appear in these photographs; textures we can almost touch. Matter has made itself present in them: the hardness and firmness of the rock, even its sharpness and power to cut, is combined with the softness of the foam, and contrasts with the ephemeral and volatile nature of the clouds, with the fragility of the leaves on the tree branches. The foam of the waves resembles the leaves. Oppositions, complementarity, similarities, contrasts: all the elements dialogue with each other to form a unity that is the totality that these twenty-four photographs aspire



Attributed to Giuseppe Tipa. *Virgin of the Assumption*. Late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Carved alabaster. Height 68 cm.

to create. It is nature in its other dimension, that which is not what we perceive with ordinary eyes, but the one that can only be seen by the inner eye, quick to capture its light, its spirit, and return it to us in its sacredness. Sacred nature, then, because that is how we recognise it in the tradition in which we must place these images that speak to us from their stillness, which has absorbed what would otherwise be invisible. Stop, wave, so I may see you in all your dimension and not in your simple appearance. Stop, wave, so I may contemplate you in your spirit, which is what animates the world around us.

[Sources cited: François Avril, «Les manuscrits illuminés de Guillaume de Machaut», in *Guillaume de Machaut : colloque-table ronde*, Université de Reims 19-22 April 1978, Klincksieck, Paris 1982, pp. 117-132; *Hercules Segers. Painter-Etcher*, catalogue, 2 vols., Huigen Leeflang & Peter Roelofs (eds.), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam 2016, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2017; Vincent Gille, *Trajectoires du rêve. Du romantisme au surréalisme*. Pavillon des Arts 7 March-7 June 2003, Paris-Musées, 2003, pp. 61-81; Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, *L'Art de la tache. Introduction à la Nouvelle méthode d'Alexander Cozens*, Éditions du Limon, Valence 1990, p. 89.]

# Balsams of Gold

Pilar Parcerisas

The landscape is illuminated with gold. The lens of the camera brings closer the waves, the rocks, the trees, the clouds—the primordial elements: air, earth, and water—which are printed in gold leaf, as if this colour reserved for what is sacred were become the illuminating fire of a fourth, absent element that is at the same time present.

The drawing-in close on stones and rocks transforms them in our eyes into colossal mountains or archaeological strata that defy identification. The forest's web of branches and leaves creates an impenetrable fabric of natural script. The crash of sea-foam from the waves dissolves in a liquid abstraction that transports their sound. The clouds swell into enchanted twilights, lit by the wind or by the rendition of a storm. Each substance is expressed in its state—solid, liquid, gaseous—and the gold leaf onto which the images are impressed makes of nature a refulgent force.

Nature is the treasure, the reliquary that is all around us and must be kept in secret. The gold leaf ensconces this nature in the most precious tabernacle, because the natural environment is beyond price and must be all inside.

The gold leaf both brings the image closer and moves it further away. The definition of 'aura' that

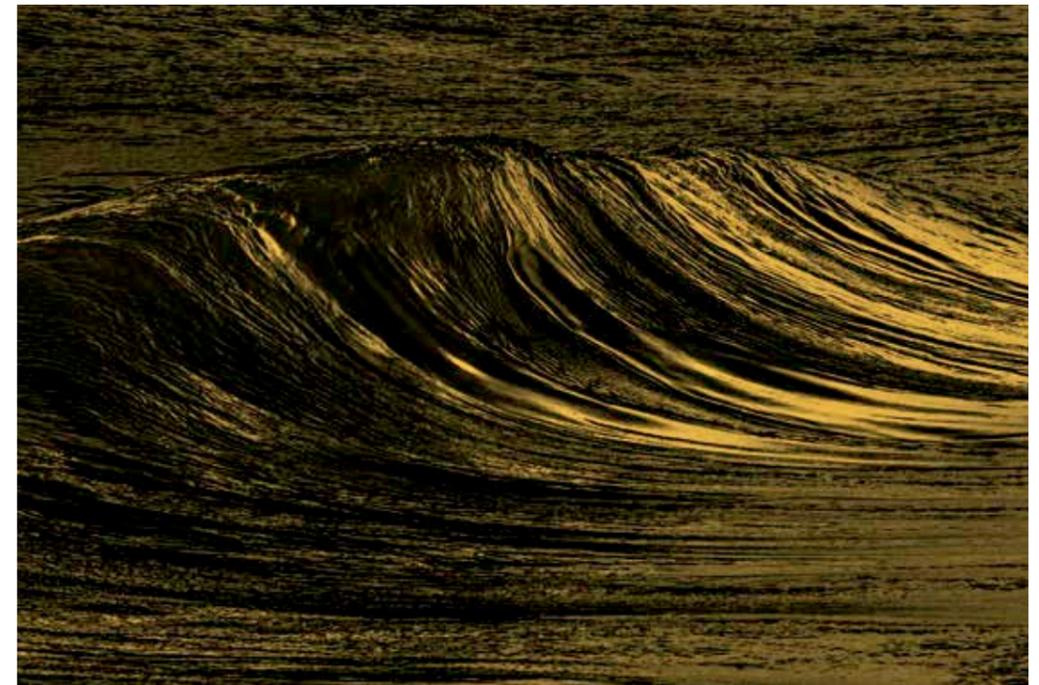
Walter Benjamin situates in a unique phenomenon of a certain distance, however close it may be, also lives in these images. Benjamin saw exhibition value as originating in the photograph's ability to subsume everything in cult value. What the intellectual of the thirties of the twentieth century saw as a devaluation of the 'aura' of the work of art in relation to its mechanical reproduction finds in these images from the twenty-first century a vision embodied in the phenomenon of restoring to the work of art its cult value through this printing on gold leaf.

This not only reinvests the work of art with 'aura' through the medium of photography, as the mechanical instrument responsible for that distancing of the landscape from the experience of the 'here and now' intrinsic to the work of art, but also does the same with nature, exalting it as an element of worship, a treasure.

Gold leaf is also memory, trace and imprint of the history of art, from Byzantium to the Renaissance and the Baroque, it concentrates the lustre of light and the supreme alchemical value. Nature is gold and these images definitively sacralise it in a world in need of sacred cult and symbols.



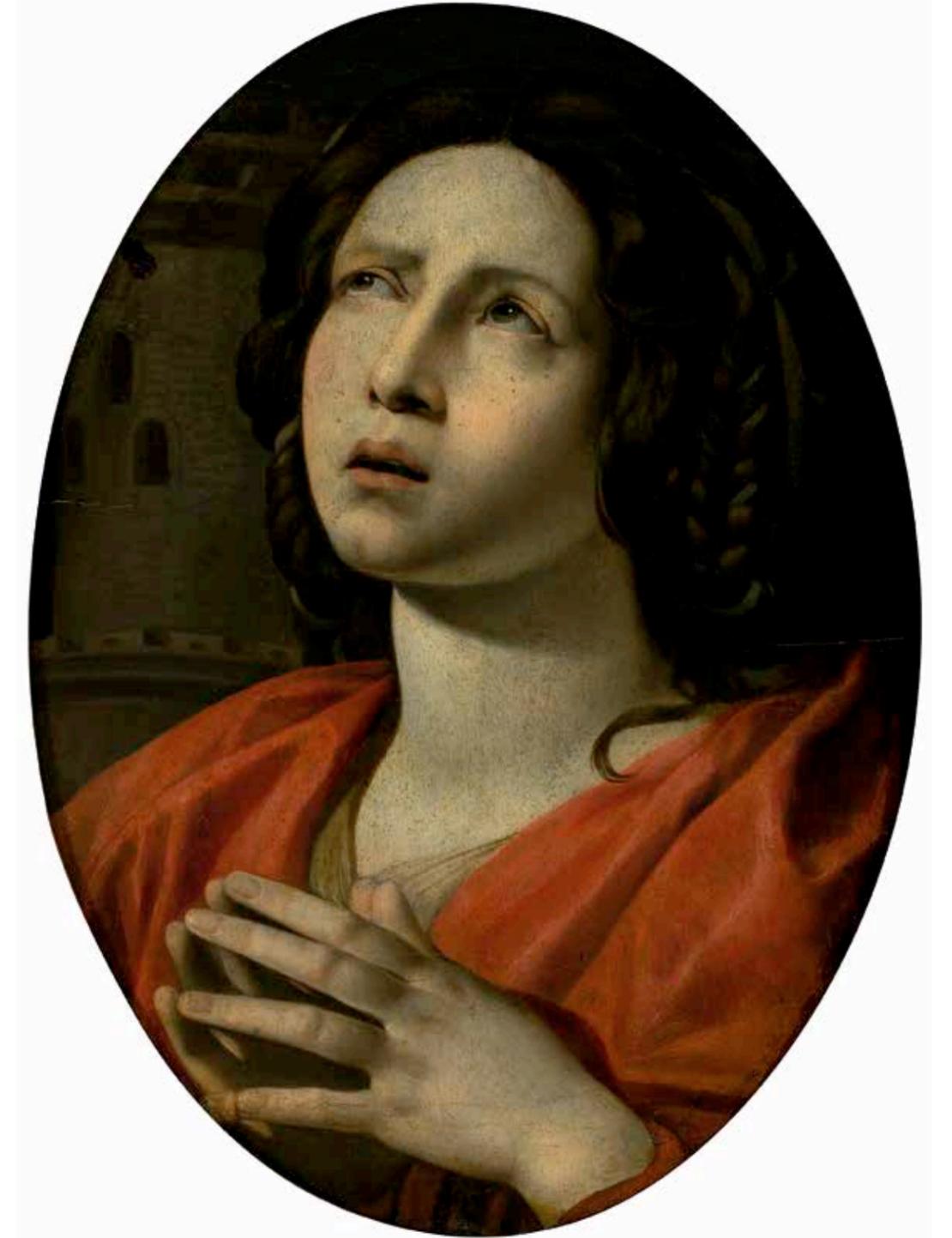
Jordi Ortiz, *L'entorn. Roca #2*. 2016 - 2018. Turó Puig road, Barcelona.  
UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 47 x 70 cm.



Jordi Ortiz, *L'entorn. Mar #1*. 2016 - 2018. Estuary of the Besòs river in the Mediterranean Sea, Barcelona.  
UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 47 x 70 cm.



Jordi Ortiz, *L'entorn. Cel #3*. 2016 - 2018. El Farró, Barcelona.  
UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 47 x 70 cm.



Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, known as Battistello, *Saint Barbara*. c. 1633. Oil on panel. 53 x 39 cm.

## Saints

Perejaume, May 2019.

With the effect of images laid out on a background that embalms them, we have before us the blinding firmness of a world printed, smoothed in gold leaf. A light traverses the stillness of each image. Viewed flat on a table, the images give off a slight glow.

These are not images covered in gold, like archaic figures; rather, the gold reflects them, lights them up and blinds them. Holy waves, holy rocks, holy trees and holy clouds invoked, perhaps, with the same primitive fervour, but which manifest themselves only with the gold kept inside. I am not sure that we might not say that the gold represents the images in the manner of prints of lustre and shiny space that spread before us foam and rocks, branches and clouds like fervent liturgies of light.

In addition, there is no need to insist on the extent to which, now more lit up from its tenderness, now more ember from having glowed too bright, gold is an intriguing support. Certainly, to the extent that the visual intensity sinks into it and, for all that is sinks in, never quite reaching the bottom, it is difficult to keep our eyes, our feet, sure on such a support. On one hand, in the radiance of a print on gold leaf the effect of truth and the effect of unreality are

enhanced; on the other, the gilding acts as a background so transparent to the step and the gaze that it insistently threatens to submerge us.

It is utterly real, in each image, the effect of looking through the image at the image itself. As if by a light made of clay, by a light made of clay, with the precise degree of transparency of the air from the light that breaks through it, the gaze walks and walks. On margins of indeterminacy, ever sharper scenes unfold. The smallest detail achieves a shimmering burnish of light and stillness. Carner says it: 'the earth dazzles with the light of the sky.' I do not feel the wind, but it does. The gold is almost all blue.

Now I see the trees, with a light from which they stand forth and a fire in which they burn, as if sun and seed were merged within them, and I also see waves, rocks and clouds like shadows with a ground of light: like a radicating and a radiating of the respective grounds towards the observer who passes through. It is an effect that I do not know how to explain in any other way than with the image of mined gold about to take on external forms. In the seventeenth century altarpieces the same thing happens.



Cristóbal Ramos, *Saint Joseph with the Child*. 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
Carved golden polychromed wood, plaster polychromed clothes. Height 88 cm.



Jordi Ortiz, *L'entorn. Bosc #2*. 2016 - 2018. Bulladera road, Barcelona.  
UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 64 x 96 cm.



Jordi Ortiz, *L'entorn. Roca #3*. 2016 - 2018. Bulladera road, Barcelona.  
UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 47 x 70 cm.



Sebastián Martínez Domedel, *Saint John*. 17<sup>th</sup> century. Oil on canvas. 75 x 53 cm.

## Our Surroundings. Sea, forest, rock, sky

Jordi Ortiz, Barcelona, 2016-2018.

Human history has come a long way. It starts among trees, passes through caves and in time installs itself in small settlement and little villages before arriving at the city, where many people decide to gather and live together. The city was and is the site of the great events and demonstrations, the place where humanity has evolved and progressed. To do this, it was necessary to damage and destroy an entire world that had accompanied us over hundreds of thousands of years. Nature has been the injured party, the great loser. We have driven it out of the city, and in doing so turned our cities into essentially mineral places. Asphalt and concrete. Nature reduced to a reminiscence of the past, a vestige of what once was.

The starting point of this project was a search for these remnants of nature and its language that still survive in the city, a desire to make them visible. To treat nature with the relevance it deserves. In this, I have taken the four fundamentals of nature as referents and set out to represent them metaphorically in images of sea, forest, rocks and sky.

I have encountered these images in two different ways. With the sea and the sky, when I set myself down in a place, the transient images, constantly moving, form themselves in front of me; with the forest and the rocks, I am the one that wanders in search of the image, until I find it where it awaits me, rooted to the ground, already formed. The project oscillates between the passive gaze—that which waits—and the active gaze—that which explores.

With the photographs, I fragment an ensemble, isolate a part, and emphasize the details and the textures. Later, I imprint the picture on paper previously burnished with real gold leaf, which—symbolically—illuminates nature, enhancing and venerating, almost sanctifying it.

These images, so luminous and so crowded together, summon a whole series of questions to my mind as I strive to comprehend them. Does the sea have feelings? Does the rock have consciousness? Does the sky have a soul? Does the forest have a sensibility?



*Sant Michael the Archangel.* Naples, late 17<sup>th</sup> century.  
Golden bronze and silver. 32 x 20 x 19 cm.

Published by Artur Ramon Art.  
Bailèn 19, 08010 Barcelona  
Photographs: Guillem Fernández-Huerta  
Graphic design: Mariona García  
Coordination: Mònica Ramon  
Translation: Graham Thomson.  
h o l o g r a f Translations

Front page: Jordi Ortiz, *Lentorn. Ce/ #5 (detail)*. 2016 – 2018. El Farró, Barcelona. UV digital printing on burnished paper with 23.75 carat gold foil. 3 units. 47 x 70 cm.

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