



Exhibition: **FERNANDO CANOVAS**
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern
19 July – 9 September 2007

Organized by: IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

Curators: Lyle Rexer and Consuelo Císcar

The retrospective exhibition of Fernando Canovas presents a wide-ranging selection of the work that he has produced during his artistic career. The 39 paintings that are being shown at the IVAM, arranged in chronological order, trace a map of his explorations. They reveal how much Canovas has in common with other fundamental artists of the last three decades but also show that he has made a radical shift in order to pursue his own path. The paintings are grouped into specific periods: *Gray Period*, *Urban Archaeologies*, *Scaffolds and Organic Landscapes*, *Ledge Series* and *Connected Paintings*.

The catalogue published to accompany the exhibition includes illustrations of the works exhibited and contains essays by Lyle Rexer, Fabián Lebenglik and Consuelo Císcar.

Fernando Canovas (Buenos Aires, 1960) went to live in Paris in the early 1980s and studied as an artist at the École des Beaux-Arts. In Paris, under the influence of two major twentieth-century artists, Pierre Alechinsky and Roberto Matta Echaurren, Canovas developed a rich, differentiating style in which he combined abstraction and symbolic representation with equal skill.

For nearly thirty years, exploration of the various dimensions of painting – spatial, perceptual and allegorical – has been a constant feature in his work. His career has been marked by abrupt changes of style. Yet those shifts, undertaken with a boldness that few artists of his generation could match, express his permanent concerns: the exploration of space and landscape, the

implications of the grid, the earliest origins of architecture and all created forms, and the development of symbols that are both personal and universal.

Canovas never completely abandons any of the visual themes that he addresses. He often goes back to motifs that he explored years earlier or else he employs different strategies simultaneously. On visiting his studio, in Buenos Aires or New York, one has the impression that various artists are working there. Nevertheless, this retrospective aims to disclose the underlying unity in his work, the themes that give cohesion to his continuing growth as an artist.

Gray Period

The works painted in the eighties and nineties struggle with many issues, often on a monumental scale. The use of a deliberately restricted palette allows Canovas to cover the surface with textures that are powerful and delicate at the same time. It also gives him reasons for exploring the relationship between drawing and painting, and between surface and background. In these works the artist introduces crucial themes, including the psychological impact of architecture, the presence of symbols and the power of allegorical narration.

Urban Archaeologies

These paintings seem to draw us towards the primeval origin of forms, as if one were entering Vulcan's legendary forge. Their architectural or industrial structures, emerging nakedly from anonymous regions (perhaps the unconscious, perhaps a plane that once was sacred and now is buried in oblivion) evoke a vocabulary of masses and forms with which one can model all the constructions in the world.

Scaffolds and Organic Landscapes

Among contemporary painters, Canovas is the one who is keenest to confront the known and the unknown. In these works he creates a kind of science fiction. He offers minutely detailed views of landscapes that we have never seen and geometrical structures that seem to have no aim other than their own proliferation. As in dreams, the geometrical may suddenly become organic; hard may become soft; what seems to be "only painting" may plunge us into a world from which we cannot escape.

Ledge Series

As in some of his earlier works, in this series he seeks to confound the distinction between painting and sculpture and cross the barrier between the viewer's space and the space of the work of art. There are many ways of interpreting these stimulating works, but their inclusion of images of containers – a frequent theme for Canovas – asserts the communal, votive role of art, as if it were a place for us to deposit our wishes, dreams, prayers and longings, a source from which to draw nourishment.

Connected Paintings

These works represent a different and perhaps unique phase. Here the accumulated experience of abstract surfaces and grids subsides into practically impenetrable curtains. Their intricate structure and colour invite the viewer to pay greater attention, though it is precisely these aspects that complicate the viewing of the pictures. They are linked by umbilical geometrical lines that create a network. Everything in these paintings is paradoxical: they are flat, yet they suggest a complex profundity; they are relatively small, but they colonize the vast space around them, including the space occupied by the viewer.