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A sample from the Lluís Hortalà exhibition at the Rocío Santa Cruz gallery.

ART

Written on marble

Josep Casamartina i Parassols

Marble and bronze have been the noble materials par excellence of sculpture, from antiquity to the first avant-gardes, when the classical tradition began to be supplanted, just as the traditional concept of representing objects, people and the world remained. Iron, cardboard and even plastic gradually gained importance compared to the material considered, until then, definitive. In contemporary art, this crystallized and polished stone has become a rarity when not used by recalcitrant detractors of modernity. Marble, likewise, is the almost invariable element of conventional and boring commemorative plaques, while at the same time being associated with death and invading most cemeteries. And until four days ago, marble was still the essential element of a kitchen, normal or select, or of a bathroom with a desire for elegance, in addition to being the cladding of banking and public institution headquarters, an imposing sign of durability and power.

But even though it has to play all the roles of the *auca*, marble is a stone that comes from the mountains, and these are destroyed by the hand and ambitions of man. This is what Elena Kervinen (Iisalmi, Finland, 1970) reminds us, who, on a small scale, symbolically returns the material to its origin. The Finnish artist has lived in Catalonia for many years and had her own gallery on Consell de Cent Street, from where she introduced other artists from her country while also being an alternative platform for Catalan authors such as Eugènia Balcells. Now, Kervinen exhibits his grayish and white mountains, surrounded by mist and crowned with a mystical aura, drawn equally with thousands of imperceptible lines on large format papers or on small mar-

ble tiles, at El Quadern Robot, a gallery that has inherited the more subtle and discreet line of Joan Prats on Balmes Street. These are works that, on the one hand, are situated in the romantic tradition of the great landscape painters of the 19th century, from the Europeans William Turner or Caspar David Friedrich to the Americans Thomas Cole or Frederic Edwin Church, and on the other, with their repetitive, concentrated and silent calligraphy, they want to be inscribed in the tradition of Chinese landscape painting. Introversion and pantheism in equal parts, with a result that often achieves beauty, a rare ob-

The noble material and its imitation focus two unusual exhibitions

jective in contemporary art, as the artist herself states. Among the ideal and archetypal mountains of Kervinen, symbol of the Cosmos, Montserrat also appears. A diffuse, magical and deserted Montserrat, far from the architectural disaster of the monastery and the mass tourist devotion it generates.

Montserrat has also been one of the most constant and celebrated themes of the sculptor Lluís Hortalà (Olot, 1959). A mountain equally stripped of nationalist and religious symbolism, which the artist shows on its narrowest and most arid side, that of the needles, it is not for nothing that climbing is one of his occupations. But if there is no room for a sense of humor in Kervinen, the opposite is true with Hortalà: irony plans whatever it wants. The enlarged postcards of Montserrat, which ap-

pear hyperrealistic, when seen from the edge, are made of scribbles that immediately undo the striking illusory effect. Apart from the usual views of Montserrat, which are now in the back room, Hortalà shows a new direction at the Galeria Rocío Santa Cruz, remaining however in the game of imitation, and submerges himself in the shining marbles of Versailles. *Il y a du monde aujourd'hui à Versailles* is a delirium of cardboard stone. Nothing is what it seems to be. The sculptor recreates the tradition of imitation, which is sometimes more interesting than reality, and the warmth of *faux marble*, which already in Roman times delighted the best frescoes until reaching the delicious provincial interiors of the 19th century, passing through the headboards of the beds of Olot, it is not for nothing that he is from La Garrrotxa. The intriguing and effective courtly rivalries between the hairdresser, daughter of a Parisian dressmaker and a monk, monk, who would become the lover of Louis XV, and the Austrian princess, friend of Mozart, who would end up being the wife of Louis XVI, give rise to ostentatious fireplaces without relief, piles of tiles piled on the floor, marble books and catalogues, and nods to the most serious historical minimalism. Everything has become a parody that maliciously plays with the aesthetic attraction it provokes which it also has; of course!

THE SECRET WEAVE

Elena Kervinen. El Quadern Robot Còrsega, 267. Barcelona Until May 14

IL Y A BIEN DU MONDE AUJOURD'HUI À VERSAILLES

Lluís Hortalà Rocío Santa Cruz Gran Via, 627. Barcelona Until May 21