

ON THE RUINS OF MODERNITY ONLY TRACES AND SURFACES (OF COLOR) REMAIN

The use of a spray gun and compressor in painting has always prompted a certain hesitation in me, largely due to the complex network of cultural references it evokes. This technique brings together a diverse range of associations, from graffiti and street art to film graphics, advertising, and pivotal moments in twentieth-century experimental painting. In those contexts, it was often embraced for its novelty and visual impact, gradually establishing itself as a kind of counter-pictorial method, deliberately positioned in contrast to the more established traditions of oil painting and fresco. Today, spray-painting and air-brushing techniques are central to a fast-evolving visual culture shaped by the dynamics of social media. They underpin an array of expressive approaches, ranging from virtuosic hyperrealism to radical abstraction. As a result, the technique occupies a liminal space, between experimental art and urban visual culture, between industrial production and direct expression, between what might seem ephemeral or marginal and what seeks to enter the historical canon. What gives this method its distinct critical potential, however, is its capacity to communicate a distributed or collective sensitivity. Its meanings are shaped not only by the image itself, but also by the contexts in which it is seen, shared, and circulated. In some instances, placing the work in "unconventional" settings can generate a kind of semantic dissonance, intensifying its poetic or political resonance. In this sense, spray-painting functions as a language that inhabits the ruins and residues of modernity, gaining an ambiguous, and therefore deeply contemporary, significance.

It is within this framework that Omar Rodriguez-Graham's recent work can be understood. This marks his first foray into the use of spray techniques, though not as a mere stylistic experiment. Rather, he reworks this approach to revisit some of the core questions that have long underpinned his practice: How does an image emerge in the present day, and what formal or conceptual qualities shape its appearance? In what ways can painting still offer a space for critical reflection, particularly when photography and painting, stillness and motion, text and image increasingly overlap and blur? What kinds of new relationships, beyond representation, can painting forge between different global visual cultures? And, crucially, what role does painting play today, not only in its making, which remains a vital concern in an age that often reduces artistic production to surface or craft, but also in terms of its relevance within the broader cultural landscape? Rather than offering fixed answers, my aim here is to propose a personal reading of Rodriguez-Graham's current work, one that places his recent explorations in dialogue with some of the most urgent questions shaping contemporary painting.

LOCAL COLOUR NO LONGER EXISTS — ONLY THE POSITIONING OF COLOUR REMAINS

Over the past decade or so, Rodriguez-Graham's painting has consistently followed a particular logic and method: a form of planar construction initiated by the deformation of an original image. In my view, this approach connects back to one of Cézanne's most significant contributions to the history of painting, namely, his investigation of structure, which led to the elevation of the pictorial plane into an autonomous reality. Such structural enquiry is by no means secondary, for upon careful reflection, it can only be expressed through painting in a sensitive manner. Although this might be understood as a metaphysical stance, it fundamentally reflects how reality is perceived and translated into visual representation. From this standpoint, structural artworks are not mere abstractions but partial, hypothetical proposals about the behaviour of reality.

Rodriguez-Graham's research situates itself within this tradition, yet in a renewed direction: rather than beginning from a direct impression of reality, his works over the last ten years

have been born from digitally altered images. This transformation endows the image with a dual nature, which the artist restores to a 'new body', so to speak, through painting. This "body", however, takes form as an articulation of colour planes bounded by drawing. Here, painting reveals explicitly its structural character: each fragment constitutes a pictorial 'form' in itself, and the composition of the work rests upon this fragmentariness, the result of a meticulous, segmented working process. This is not to deny the possibility of improvisation or error, but to affirm that the formation and presentation of each component confer upon it a specific significance. Thus, the painting is conceived as the sum of its fragments. To realise this, the work is produced section by section in something akin to an assembly line; each part is strictly delimited by lines and treated with exacting care. The viewer's perception of the canvas shifts depending on proximity: close up, individual fragments reveal their detail; from afar, they dissolve into an overall chromatic articulation. In his most recent pieces, the painting exerts a subtle pressure on its stretcher and support, altering dimensions and form until composition, shape and surface coincide, the pictorial structure becoming its very support.

However, in the series under discussion, this logic undergoes a radical shift, which lends it particular significance. The exploration remains anchored to a constant question: how can an image emerge from the very plane of painting, retaining its surface nature even through multiple overlays of material? Hence the notion of a 'surface-oriented' painting that does not seek to simulate condition or effect. Although some works assume a figurative quality by virtue of their titles (*El Campo Pleno con Flores Salvajes*, *El Viento Pesado con Cenizas*), the reference seems more poetic than representational.

Sprayed with an air compression gun, these new modes of painting refer to painting understood as layer, as trace, and as colour that is delocalised and in constant flux. Executed directly on canvas affixed to the wall, using acrylic paint often in pastel tones, sometimes generated by the canvas's luminosity filtered through semi-transparent veils, the layers accumulate gradually, avoiding drips and enabling soft overlaps and often imperceptible transitions. Nevertheless, depth remains partly visible through intermediate barriers created by the artist with various objects and adhesive tape. In this way, there is no base image nor narrative objective, yet without relinquishing compositional structure or disciplined colour application. Painting thus comes into being through tensions between surfaces: wall, canvas, paint, tape, object. Colour is no longer a localised element, clearly defined and bounded, but manifests in shifting relations as the painting's surface becomes layer upon layer of hue.

This process draws from Rodríguez-Graham's experience with watercolour, where colour fields emerge through dilution rather than material build-up. He interprets the effect of watercolour on canvas via spray gun to achieve visible pentimenti across expansive parts of the surface. Colour resonates with other colours, allowing for the exploration of luminosity: indeed, his works radiate light through chromatic contrast.

The complexity of these paintings lies not only in technique but also in the choices of colour, tone, chromatic field and saturation. Here, the spray gun assumes a decisive role: painting with this tool involves a delicate relationship between distance and pressure. The closer the gun and the stronger the trigger pressure, the greater the colour's saturation; conversely, greater distance and lighter trigger pressure yield less saturation. Viewed in this light, the works also become studies in control and the interplay between determination and chance in painting.

Beyond colour application, all the paintings include overlapping lines, sometimes black, sometimes translucent, varying in saturation and scale, resembling scratches or scribbles. These strokes serve at least three functions: firstly, they establish relationships between

chromatic fields, acting as traces from underlying layers to the surface or between different paint strata; secondly, they generate visual tension that imparts a sense of volume, acting as screens that disrupt the colour field and create a constellation that deepens visual space; thirdly, depending on their direction, they exert a force that either pushes the gaze outward from the canvas or draws it toward the centre. These graphic elements are essential: compared with previous works, they seem to liberate drawing from its fixed position, imparting a new dynamic to the painting. A rhythm emerges, granting the works a musical character of cadence and pulse.

The overall result is a new conception of surface colour, freer, more direct, in which, paradoxically, the build-up of paint material underscores painting as a site of enacted action. From this perspective, Rodriguez-Graham's new series conveys neither hidden meaning nor seeks explicit communication, nor is it an expression of subjective gesture. Rather, it evokes a continuous interplay of presence and absence, in which the canvas ceases to be a screen for projection and instead becomes a surface on which events deposit.

A MATTER OF TIME

For me, each work in the series is singular in its compositional logic, yet palpably part of a broader whole. Here, seriality concerns how individual paintings relate to one another, whether through dialogue, technical variation, or the experimental unfolding of a specific experience. What is particularly striking is the accelerated tempo of production: unlike earlier, more labour-intensive work, this series employs the rapid drying qualities of acrylic, swift airbrush application, and minimal layering thickness to create with greater agility. This mode of execution aligns with the artist's intentions regarding viewers' engagement, considering how long one might dwell on an individual piece and on the series as a whole. For Rodriguez-Graham, the time of making and the time of viewing are intertwined in a temporal suspension born of pictorial contemplation.

Yet this reciprocity is neither straightforward nor inversely proportional. It is shaped by an imaginative conception of time, activated through specific modes of perception. Thus, a quickly executed painting, with minimal detail or simplified gesture, does not necessitate a similarly rapid act of viewing, nor does it preclude prolonged contemplation. The temporality of the painting is defined both by the artist's intention during creation and by the viewer's perceptual engagement.

The question of time—how long one attends to a work—has always been central to reflections on painting. This temporality depends on a variety of factors: technical decisions, conceptual concerns, the image produced, and the desired visual effect. What Rodriguez-Graham achieves with this series is to make unavoidable the reflection on the relationship between time of execution and time of perception—an entanglement made manifest on the pictorial plane through layering, tape, and objects between strata. The painting's temporality is produced by the plurality of planes configured through these layered accretions. Each canvas—and the series collectively—thus constitutes an invitation to perceive the time embedded within the chromatic arrangement and surface construction.

A PLAY OF IMAGINARIES

Finally, thinking this series in relation to earlier cultural references: what specificity does it evoke that differentiates it from other paintings employing the same technique? These works acquire a distinct quality through the spatial relationships they generate and the temporal demands they impose. Yet the cultural echoes—graffiti, industrial aesthetics—remain circumscribed within the series, not overtly foregrounded. For instance, though not graffiti, the works foster reflection on urban stratification of paint and how city walls record

traces of use and time. They don't refer to automotive painting or industrial coatings, yet suggest wear, residue, memory of apparatus. They are not figurative works aimed at decoration or advertising, but rather explore how forms configure themselves in the superficiality of canvas and chromatic planes. Rodríguez Graham's painting, ultimately, functions as a form of resistance—resistance to technical industrial instrumentalism and to the automatisms of digital machinery. His practice is an uncompromising inquiry into time as action and space as colour, evoking a renewed perceptual sensibility.

- Daniel Montero