

III

# Free Energy

*He could make planets collide and produce his suns and stars, his heat and light; he could originate life in all its infinite forms.*

Nikola Tesla, scientist and inventor,  
*The New York Times*, April 19, 1908

Exhibition,  
Museo de Santa Cruz,  
Toledo, Spain, 2019

— Room 1

How does one feel the plurality of the worlds? The worlds of David Lewis or Umberto Eco, the worlds of the wanderer overcome by the landscape: rivers, plains or trees dotted with light, by the beauty of the fabrics strewn on the ground before being taken away by the memory of the traveller, the maps he consults, coloured by a thousand territories; the maps of water, of the earth and the air where paint floats, the fragments of the paintings that we have under our eyes and that come together. They utter the names of the masters they admire: Henri Matisse, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning. They are the secret digits, the planets of a cosmos that spin the head or take it on a dance.

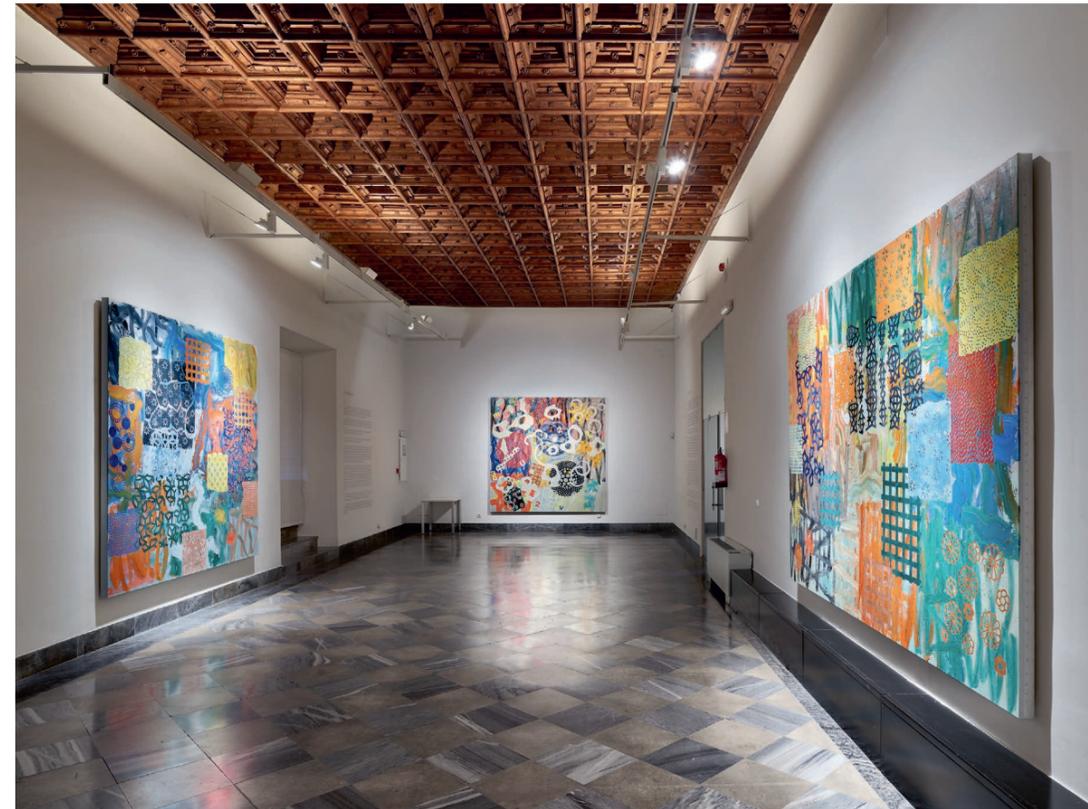
Yves Zurstrassen dances with his hands and thoughts to open up a space by gluing, tearing, peeling, until he is at the heart of the place and the movement he wants to reach. François Barré evokes a place inhabited by the ghost of contrasts. A ghost spinning onto itself, then imploding 'red light, green light', exploding. At once circle and square, nonconformist and colourful, these ghosts open the carnival of shapes.

— Room 2

Living an exhibition is not living one's life, but it is like grasping one hundred thousand lives. Once intoxicated by colours, the energy of chaos and the infinite love for life, the feverish consumption of desires, the movement depletes and death is just around the corner. Music can barely be heard and we can barely figure wefts, lacunas, openings, the worried, questioning eye of Picasso or the ghostly gaze of one of Cézanne's skulls in a dissimulated vanitas.

The eyes work with the hands, with the ripping gesture, but also with the straight drawing, the plan, the laser cutting. We are at the 'interval' of the hour of the wolf, over time, between the confusion of nature and the architecture that Yves Zurstrassen arranges mezzo voce, 'in a silent way'. Does he observe his constructions from reality in the same way as Fernand Léger, seeing everything around him, the space of our industrious lives? Or does he build these constructions by closing his 'physical eye' to contemplate the inside of his skull? Let us recall that his skull is his first studio, an invisible and vital space to which he gives a body, albeit a body on a tightrope.

YVES ZURSTRASSEN





Museo de Santa Cruz,  
Toledo, Spain, 2019  
—Room 2



—Room 3

*Crow roasted the earth to a clinker,  
he charged into space –  
Where is the Black Beast?  
The silences of space decamped,  
space flitted in every direction –  
Where is the Black Beast*

Ted Hughes, 'The Black Beast', *Crow*, 1970

Since Pierre Bonnard, we have known that black is a colour. Black carries the freedom and energy of the world. Pierre Soulages shows us that it is crossed by a thousand hues, a thousand nuances, a thousand lights. Franz Kline delineates that it is also at the emergence of every form. Black is often the colour of writing, of letters and words, the splendour of the sign, the colour of the impulse for Jean Degottex or, for Christopher Wool, the sign of the straight construction, the rhythm between empty and full. In the West, black is a colour that is not without danger. It threatens us with death or night. By opposition to white, it is the hypothesis of an occultation, a depression, a blinding, in order to see better, to see 'once again'. It is for this that Yves Zurstrassen fights, that he constructs and deconstructs. He gathers strength from this 'white and black' adventure.

In black, renowned English poet Ted Hughes saw the traits of a strange creature. Sometimes, space flees in all directions, and this is the space that he 'hunts'. Armed with black, he hunts the space the way Herman Melville chased it with Moby Dick's white skin as the two intertwined.



—Room 4

Then there is Spain, with its sometimes rigorous colours. The Spain of Toledo, its stone walls, and more to the south, the colours of the earth, the villages and countryside, yellow ochre or ochre as dark as the Italian soil. The dark of the architecture, houses and landscapes, the black in Morandi's paintings. The embers of the fire. The rhythms and clefts of the brown and black that mingle with Arab and Andalusian memories. I hear their songs as we walk inside the dark architectures, mirages of these solar countries, of the sun from which the mashra-biyya protect us thanks to their parietal spaces where shadow and light inhabit the 'pierced-crossed' space from dawn until dusk, by the movement of the day, the movement of the wind. The map of the painting is split, dilated, dissolved by the drawing of the arabesques, by the constant dialogue between the geometry and the sinuousness of the lines.

This opposition — or rather superimposition — this permanent interweaving between angle and curve is in no way a matter of décor, but rather a mental and existential poetry that we also find in Philip Taaffe's work. The painting is the metaphor and the metonymy of this infinite search for an unreachable balance. It is the mobile weft of our lives.



—Room 5

Yves Zurstrassen takes the austere beauty of Spain to his various studios and has understood their pace and rigour. Spain is a part of himself, of his geometry and movement. The movement and geometry of Toledo and Seville, with their brighter, livelier colours. This situation participates in the syncretism of his painting, in his visual expression that allows, after the shadow, recapturing already-encountered colours, no longer the expression of dissemination or fever, but elements of the composition and precise choreographies of forms.

We stand before a dance and an artist who believes in the ability of shapes to dance, to offer us a joyful knowledge, a dancing knowledge. This is not an equilibrist philosophy, but the search for a method, a vitalist principle, yet suspended, a choreography made up of poses and restored revolution, albeit a controlled revolution. Emotions run high when we see this 'fixed-exploding', higher still when we experience this quest that brings abstraction and figuration as closely together as possible to express the structure of reality. Here, abstraction creates more reality. An intense reality, as we find in other contemporaries, such as Albert Oehlen or Jonathan Lasker, but even more still — since this is all about the dance — in Piet Mondrian's unforgettable *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*.