

appearance or identity, the diverse realities of the physical or spiritual world.” That is Barcala’s aesthetics in a nutshell, his particular version of the collage aesthetic, which tends to blur the limits between genres, between rationality and chaos, between art and life.

Of course, this is a collage. And Barcala knows that the impact of a collage lies not in its power of representation, but in its capacity to propose “all of the possible virtualities” intrinsic to its materials, which is why he himself has said that “the material I use gives off a powerful force, and later it is difficult to let go of that.” However, how does the artist manage his confrontation with the materials, or his work with objects? It seems as if Barcala is suggesting to us that painters are no longer windows on the world, because they have become pieces of that world.

Barcala creates a noteworthy tension between two systems: one is that of material forms, which in traditional terminology could be the equivalent to ground, brought to fruition on the basis of fragments of flat materials and painting, and transmitted in a frankly informalist language. Another is the system of bits of wood (toothpicks, little sticks), which could be seen as the figure, created based on impoverished three-dimensional elements, through which he brings about a strange geometry, a certain constructivism that he superimposes onto the ground of his pictures, defining their expressiveness. The forms that sail about this background are sometimes subordinated to the structure of the sticks (for example, a fabric circle within a triangle made with bits of wood), whilst others are in counterpoint to them, and yet others provide contrast, but there are always highly significant resonances between them.

Over the course of half a century, Barcala has built up a highly personal oeuvre, coherent and rigorous; avoiding stridence, he took refuge in a stripped-down language, intimate, almost hermetic—and at the same time, oozing sensitivity. Because for Barcala (converging with the model of Rafael Barradas, who also lived, studied, created, and showed in Spain) this artist *lives* being a painter to the point of inhabiting a (spiritual?) identity somewhere between the job of painting and the job of living.

Since Barcala’s language is not only that of painting, but also spills over into other disciplines, it could be said that he is a *painter of limits, of frontiers*. Now these boundaries overflow their channels, they invade each others’ space, they erode each other, and it is at the remaining interstices *between* genres, where new art must be produced—an art that does not fit into any of the previous codes established for each genre, but which cuts across all of them, catalysing new artists’ viewpoints about their surroundings, and themselves.

All of Barcala’s works are hidden metaphors, whose access is very difficult. As it happens, language now increases the distance between beings and entities, so the ready-made proposes a short-circuit: by symbolising itself, it cuts off any possibility of representation. Therefore, when Barcala uses triangles (as he nearly always does), perhaps he is thinking about the trinity, whether in its theological version or not. And when he incorporates the number one, surely this symbolises unity. The search for it, or its impossibility? His work of deconstruction and reconstruction could throw up ambiguous indices: sometimes the achievement of unity seems an impossible task, and others it seems to be within the artist’s reach. Perhaps the hope that this unity can indeed be reached is the prime mover behind every artist’s work?



Vargas-Suárez  
Universal,  
*Virus Americanus*.  
Installation,  
variable dimensions.  
Courtesy Thomas  
Erben Gallery,  
New York.

## VIRUS AMERICANUS

Julieta González,  
curator at the Caracas  
Museum of Fine Art

“Tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities, is fundamentally nothing more than the leisure of going to see what has become banal. The economic organisation of visits to different places is already in itself the guarantee of their equivalence. The same modernisation that removed time from the voyage also removed from it the reality of space.” (Guy Ernest Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*).

Airport, museum and exhibition centre; seemingly disparate and disconnected places, which today are part of the greater public sphere. Vargas-Suárez Universal’s images seem to speak of these spaces, some of which make up the visual, material and spatial support of his work. Walking around the ARCO’03 exhibition centre, the work stood out strikingly against the standard backdrop of gallery stands displaying, for the greater part, the usual “bill of fare”. The booth was intervened in its totality by a sprawling painting in red and white which upon closer inspection revealed intricate structures, reminiscent of machines, air and spacecraft designs, but also of the architecture of public space.

This installation is part of a series of recent works by Vargas-Suárez Universal in which he intervenes the exhibition space with these “wall-drawings”. Fresco painting and murals, as well as site-specific installations, are references in VSU’s works which are painted directly onto the wall. But the wall is not only the physical support of the painting, it is the white empty space of VSU’s uncanny structures. Architectures of the void, of the empty public space, of the virtual space of electronic circuits, all come together in a formless and chaotic accumulation of

structures which resonates with the Situationist critique of the spectacle and the role that public space plays in this “spectacularisation” as an important agent in the alienation of the individual in contemporary society.

The Situationist references I found in the work were not only in terms of the image and the ideas to which it relates, but were also clearly inscribed within the artist’s own operative strategies.

Automation—described by Asger Jorn and Debord as akin to the concepts of *dérive* and *détournement*—is the operation through which the artist executed the painting, creating the images through blind-drawing, with felt-tip markers. Even though this work was not executed directly onto the wall—ARCO’s duration and logistics impeded its labour-intensive and time consuming production—its overpowering presence annulled the space of the booth and turned it into something else, an element of subversion in the clearly demarcated architecture of the exhibition centre. The conceptual strength of the work and its open invasion of space articulated a critique of the homogenisation that these spaces produce with whatever they display even though they constitute a primary and necessary vehicle for the circulation and distribution of art. But more importantly, it was a reminder that the work can retain its critical and subversive potential even when inscribed within the context and spatial dynamics of an art fair, where art is not always transformed into commodity or spectacle.