

Marisela Berenguel

Introduction to '*Kegelbahn*', an exhibition by Christoph Mádico Bosch

Stapflehus, Kunstverein Weil am Rhein

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1. Observation

In the act of climbing high mountains, using your hands and feet as anchors, an eye that looks for crevices, small holes, protuberances and cracks is trained and develops. This eye has the ability to register especially significant details. This eye actively seeks and acquires information from what may look as a solid, unconquerable mass and detects, by watching, the small space where fingertips can next penetrate enough to cling and allow the rest of the body to follow reaching new heights painstakingly.

Christoph Mádico Bosch's eye is that kind of eye, the one is warranty of survival.

Observing attentively makes us one with the thing observed, we are fully present and that act of observation becomes a way of enquiring.¹

2. Circular

When driving through the same roads that every day we need to take and passing through the same villages that for years we have been transiting, *the observing eye* maps the so well-known territory, noticing, registering small details. *The observing eye* watches carefully, collects and scrutinises.

Mádico Bosch attentive perception takes notes of marks and traces on the tarmac, which indicates that something is happening repeatedly. These marks that have appeared on certain points of the road, what are they? *The careful eye* raises questions and explores, comes back and takes photos, analyses and finds an explanation.

These marks talk about an event that has happened over time. Also, they tell about how certain materials behave. In this case, these marks can be easily overlooked, but they tell a particular story and lead us to reflect, ask us to be present even when in familiar spaces, where apparently, only things that we already knew can happen.

The observing eye wants us to be alert, wants us to be active participators of the quotidian and get in touch with the time that has passed and imprinted itself on pavements, roads and building façades. This time has built places but also has made us. *The observing eye* wants us to be alive.

1 *Bento's Sketchbook. John Berger. Pantheon, England, 2011.*

3. Cannonballs-heads

Màdico Bosch's eye raises questions, how, why, when and so on. The attentive scrutiny of the apparently insignificant takes this artist to connect with the questions raised about one of the first and most famous photographs of war: "The Valley of the Shadow of Death".

Roger Fenton took a photo of cannonballs lying along a road in the Crimean War in 1875. Controversy has surrounded this photo for many years. Writers such as Susan Sonntag wrote about this photo.² Did Roger Fenton³ stage the cannonballs for his photograph or is his photograph an accurate record of what he observed? A study done by the filmmaker Errol Morris⁴ seems to prove Fenton placed the cannonballs on the road.

This issue, which might seem irrelevant, has raised very important questions: what is the truth? How do we relate to other people's suffering? What was the intention of Robert Fenton when staging the cannonballs, did he want to 'enhance' the photo to make the observer experience in a closer manner the feelings of pain and despair that war brings to human beings?

When watching Màdico Bosch unfired clay pieces I ask myself, are they heads or bowling balls? I said to myself, they are both and an eerie feeling makes the hairs of my spine stand on end.

Is killing and dying just a game? Who is throwing *the balls*? Who are *the pins*? How many times per second are *pins* around the world knocked down?

Is the one who throws *the ball* the same person who receives the kick?

Is the one who falls in the ditch the same one who threw *the ball*?

Is there a difference between the fallen and the spectator?

Is there a difference?

Màdico Bosch clay pieces, I said to myself, are heads, yes, but skulls rather. Skulls that are still wearing their skin.

What colour of skin are we when we are dead?

2 "Regarding the pain of others" Susan Sonntag. Penguin books, England, 2003.

3 Robert Fenton (1819-1869) one of the first war photographers. He was instrumental in founding The Royal Photographic Society.

4 Errol Morris (1948) is a filmmaker, best known for his 1988 documentary *The Thin Blue Line*.

These heads resemble Munch's painting, 'The Scream'. They are thrown on the ground and gathered as if in the aftermath of a battlefield in which beheading was the norm. They are thrown on the ground as if they were the cannonballs that Roger Fenton photographed. *These heads* may be in the process of being stripped off of what they have got left. Their eyes though have already been removed, that is why I hear their screams.

The holes they have made them easy to handle. Fingers can be put through these holes. *These heads-skulls* can be lifted and rolled in a *bowling alley*. They will knock down pins for *fun*. *These head-skulls* that don't belong anymore to anybody, but are everybody, become weapons. As cannonballs, they can be a solid shot or can be loaded and explode.

4. Fence

Heads that look as if they have been pierced but they are not. Are they the spare heads of the fence rails that were cut from public places in England during the World War II, when they believed there was a shortage of iron to make ammunition, but later realised that extra iron was not needed and threw the fences in the river Thames? ⁵

These heads may have already been targeted, but for the time being, they are allowed 'to play dead', until the day comes when the missing tip of the spear will truly pierce them through.

5. The '*Zum Engel*'

For Màdico Bosch exercising *the observing eye* never stops, as when climbing, your life depends on it. This is why when going frequently through the Dinkelberg village of Minseln, his attention was caught by the particular features of a building, details like a discreet spire, the faded name of an establishment, the design of a fence that was made to measure. *The observing eye* registered it as being significant, took note and came back many times to explore the place by watching carefully and recording it.

It was a surprise that the **Zum Engel** used to be a hall with restaurant and a bowling alley! For Màdico Bosch somehow *the heads* that could be rolled like bowling balls found their way in local history. No wonder that inside the **Zum Engel** he found on the floor also a couple of footballs, a globe of planet earth, a fallen pin in the ditch and a bowling ball.

Bowling (Kegel), is the Germanic version of a similar game played in ancient Egypt. In C16.⁶ Germans made pins from bones of bull feet, filled them with lead to give them weight and stability - fingers and feet

5 <http://www.londongardenstrust.org/features/railings3.htm>

6 www.indoorbowling-coffsharbour.websyte.com.au

of the bull were associated with luck- It is said that monks tried to stop the game from being played as it often led to fights because of people betting on who would win. However, apparently even monks were very keen on the game and secretly played it in their monasteries and regarded the pins as pagans and demons.⁷

The **Zum Engel**'s bowling alley was built after World War I and it was only in use until the outbreak of World War II. The bowling alley has since been shut. It was not allowed to function during the years of the war because the hall had to be used to accommodate troops.

6. The invisible war

Are we in a silent war in which there are not battlefields full of carnage –as the ones we see in photographs from afar- but the result of us becoming numbed by the daily avalanche of images of faraway horrors?

Around us, there are not dismembered bodies lying on the ground but 'human beings' who seem to be intact except for the fact that their imagination, compassion and obligation of consciousness seems to have disappeared.

Do we believe as spectators of other people's suffering to be better off than the massacred bodies that we watch? Or perhaps, we have become 'heads' from where all content have being poured out, 'heads' that can be held and rolled on the infinite 'bowling alleys' of the world, 'heads' that knock down those who are believed to be 'the pins'?

Do we see ourselves as 'the other', the one is not affected, harmed and killed? Or actually, by failing to be lead by our obligation of consciousness, aren't we *knocking down*, in the first place, our own selves?

The observing eye is raising questions.

7 http://othes.univie.ac.at/19990/1/2012-04-18_0002056.pdf Spielzeug und Spielformen im Mittelalter, Karin Lackner, page 88, Wien, 2012.