

JOSÉ MARÍA SICILIA

Light on Light

17 January - 29 February 2020

*J'ai toujours souhaité que mes oeuvres aient la légèreté
et la gaieté du printemps qui ne laisse jamais soupçonner le travail qu'il a coûté*
Letter from Henri Matisse to Harry Clifford

For his fifth personal exhibition, **José María Sicilia** inaugurates a new series called *Light on Light*. The title is a perfect description of the works, since each one is a reflection of a physics experiment on the diffraction of light carried out by Thomas Young in 1801. This experiment enables the viewer to grasp the wave nature of light. José María Sicilia started to take an interest in this more than five years ago, with the wish to convert it into visible forms. «Making light visible»: quite a project! What is particularly interesting here is not mathematical accuracy, but a breakdown, a transcription, a conversion of the light into visible forms.

The works in this series consist of two extremely fine gauze fabrics superimposed, each embroidered with coloured silk. So there are two layers, two strata a few centimetres apart, which forces the visitor's eye to zoom in, look at the detail, and consider the various levels. This superimposition of information seems to indicate that there is something other than what the eye sees immediately. That the reclusive, buried or concealed aspects embody as much richness and hope as what can be seen straightaway. As if there were an underlying truth or as if the illusion of vision was permanent.

Although this logic of transparency has pervaded Sicilia's work since his beeswax works, through to the more recent works on birdsong, in *Light on Light* the viewer may perceive a new desire to explore the limits of a technique on the one hand and to incite the viewer to diversify their viewpoints on the other. What a fascinating experience to take a sidelong look at the works and then come closer, to vary the viewpoints and realise the wonderful richness of the colours in the silk! Sicilia is playing with light and colours as a master glassmaker might have done in the Middle Ages. Certain of the works, like the three large ones in the rear room, are reminiscent of stained glass windows. They embody the exuberance of nature and the hypnotic power of majestic works. We encounter the idea of a 'balanced, pure, tranquil art' that was so dear to Matisse, and which exists to calm and relax the viewer irrespective of whether he is a labourer or a businessman. And this purity comes from the joy conveyed by the colours, and by the dynamism and vitality of lines. When looking at these light paintings, we understand that Sicilia draws as much as he paints. British anthropologist Tim Ingold points out that the same English verb, to draw, has two meanings which correspond to two distinct manual activities: to manipulate threads and to mark lines. Sicilia's work is iconic in this respect: the threads are converted into lines. They are embroidered onto a surface but also create and define the surface like a geometric plane.

José María Sicilia has always worked with his gaze directed towards the open sea, pointing at the horizon, without worrying about limits. He has always encouraged the wandering gaze rather than the obligation to understand or see something specific. By creating these networks and paths, this interlacing and meshing, he shows us life in its labyrinthine complexity. So how can we fail to think of the thread given by Ariadne to Theseus to find his way out of the labyrinth where the Minotaur raged? Can we not see in *Light on Light* a series of works that could also help us to find our way out of the labyrinth?

Sicilia has a dense international career. The universal character of his work is universally appreciated; witness the acquisitions of the following museums: MoMA, New York ; Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York (USA), Museo Nacional d'Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (Spain), CAPC, Bordeaux ; Centre Pompidou, Paris (France), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (Australia), MAC'S, Grand-Hornu (Belgium), Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Turin (Italy), Museum of Modern Art, Gunma (Japan).