

Arturo Herrera - You are here

Arturo Herrera's work weaves in and out of meanings, times, stylistic genres, art-historical concepts and pop-culture icons. It swings between figuration and abstraction. And it moves up and down in scale – from large murals on buildings in public space to small, exclusive book projects available to only one person at a time. Murals like *Half-Time*, at the Tate Modern in 2015, and *Adam*, at the Linda Pace Foundation in 2013, are voluminous yet powerful. The relationships between lines and planes, figure and ground, are playful and dynamic – lines cross planes, planes turn into lines, lines shift, bleed out and become plane and shape in a terrific organic whirl. The same visual intensity and power is found in Herrera's collages. But while the large murals almost hover and seem miraculously light, the collages are distinguished by an altogether different denseness established by the juxtaposition of manifold layers and materials.

A fascination and enthusiasm for movement and mutability, picture-making and meaning-creation, is evident in Herrera's early work, from the late '90s and '00s, as well as in his latest series. He starts with material that is pre-loaded with meaning, such as Disney's version of a whitetail deer, the character Bambi (*Still*, 2000), or Richard Wagner's Parsifal (*Parsifal*, 2012). This is not limited to the content, like a character, a piece of music or a literary work. It can also be a loaded expression, like Pop art's simple, stylized figures and slick surfaces or Abstract Expressionist drips, which he has incorporated in his large paper cut-out series as well as cut felt pieces. Combining worlds and the meanings already embedded in them, he brings together felt and oils, Pop art and abstraction. Different times, systems and premises merge. This seems to apply to all of his work, whether in sculpture, collage, painting, photography or video. Collage is just one among the many media he masters, but it is also more than that. The device of collage permeates his practice.

Collage gained ground in the 20th century, first through the formal experiments of Cubism around 1913, and later in the more political and hard-hitting works of the Dadaists. However different, both art movements employed collage as a device for dissolving traditional hierarchies of representation. Different temporalities and contexts are always in play in collage, since it is made up of fragments taken out of their original context and recombined. This produces an accumulation of statements that have lost their original function, retaining only fragments of it, and are juxtaposed with other fragments in the collage. A collage, thus, is more than an *image* of a loss of meaning. It is also, in turn, a factor triggering the whole apparatus of meaning-creation. This is the tradition that Herrera addresses and further unfolds. Collage is a fundamental device running through all of his work, whether in sculpture, painting, installation or, indeed, collages.

It is not so strange, then, that Herrera carries elements and working methods from one medium over into another, weaving a fine web of contexts and visual and technical cross-references between his works. In 2014, when he first started painting after years with collage as his main medium, traces of collage were still clearly visible as a system of layers in the paintings. Now, his new series of collages carries over elements from the paintings. True to his method, the backdrop for the collages – blue, floral wallpaper from a botany book – has been given expression through stories linking worlds as disparate as the immense *Flora Danica* project and Copenhagen's Meatpacking District white and blue colour scheme, where the exhibition is set. The links are concrete, even if only suggested in the work.

The series itself comprises a number of intense, dense collages, so tactile and rich in layers and materials that they approximate relief and acquire an object-like character. Their dimensions vary. The smallest are around 40 cm high, the largest is almost 100 cm. They are made from a variety of sources: painted pieces of canvas and cardboard, comic book pages with torn edges, postcards, glossy magazine fragments, paper clippings. Though many different leftover materials are used, their combination lends them a crispness, lines following lines and one shape naturally interlocking with another. Herrera's work in painting flows seamlessly into these pictures, tying them together. They are bold and brightly coloured, with broad, assertive marks of the brush. But the biggest change from his past work is the support on which the collages are made: aluminium plates left over from a lithographic printing process. The plate holds vestiges of the original source, but the marks are so obscured and vague that their origins are untraceable. The history is visible as indistinct scrawls, not as a concrete image.

In these new works, Herrera adds another dimension to his practice, giving pride of place to the unstoppable transformation of visual information. Having previously worked with images that carry clear messages, he now opens the floodgates to the overlooked and the left-out. What once had no meaning now bestows meaning. The image that never quite was becomes an image that creates. Because the printing plates were left over from Herrera's previous projects they now provide a concrete presence of collapse. But here, the collapse becomes a confirmation of the power of images. Herrera converts the negation into dynamic content and powerful form, harnessing discarded materials to generate a new pictorial entity.

*Dina Vester Feilberg (b. 1976), director of
the Rønnebæksholm Exhibition Hall*