

# missing spain

## The Fabric of Missing.

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A flotilla of shimmering red reflector discs hangs from a balcony high up in the gallery, mapping out the fabric of a space which is paradoxically solid and air, transparency and colour. Call it a gigantic veil, or a scrap of a mantilla, the flamenco dancer's shawl, this blown up detail becomes a synecdoche to memory, given Marti's title "Missing Spain." And if this title prods the viewer to musing on mundane associations between material remainders and memory, well and good, for Marti is no snob, deliberately situating his work in the vernacular of everyday thoughts and speech. Marti never refuses the obvious, preferring to go with it, knowing well that the obvious is the entry point for a more complex sequence of thoughts. Therefore, he doesn't shirk from offering a visual stimulus which everyone can comfortably connect to the obvious suggestiveness of "Spanish" red.

Even so, his swatch is magnified to the proportions of a tremendous blank, dazzling and a little bombastic, quiet with the humour of hiding nothing, but also not giving very much away. There's little that's definitive in this reminder of Spain, no clues as to what, exactly, Marti is missing.

That's part of the strategy. The elegance of the work relies on the lack of attachment, or on what could be called a certain deliberate detachability, inherent in the nature of fabric. A scrap of fabric, or a suspended veil, equally calls to a phantomatic wearer or a potential substrate. Thus left to itself, fabric suffers the condition of missing.

Fabric, in itself, has a particular ontological status which puts it in a different category to more traditional mediums of art. It's both more and less than the two dimensionality of a purely representational surface; more in its tendency towards folding which makes it akin to form, but less in that, unlike a stretched canvas or paper, it's never fully unfolds into a flatness entirely open to inscription. Therefore, somewhat mysterious in its engagement with both form and surface, it can alternatively conceal to reveal, or reveal to conceal. But, then, it's never quite a three-dimensional form standing on its own. This puts fabric in the strange ground of the in-between, neither surface nor form, floating and flowing around bodies whilst refusing a fuller substantiality. It hints at having substance while calling for its substrate. Perhaps Derrida was recalling the properties of fabric when he described the archetrace as registering the "being imprinted of the imprint"<sup>1</sup>. Fabric records impressions yet has no constant impression in itself. It can always be ironed or shaken out, or set to fluttering, for example, as a measure of the wind. It's an in-between medium both mutable enough to refuse constancy and consistency, yet immutable enough to bear traces. Small wonder that Derridian deconstruction often makes references to fabric as evidencing the in-between which suspends ontology's full presence and being-there<sup>2</sup>.

Marti intuitively connects this aspect of fabric's in-betweenness to the emotional condition of missing. Missing is a particular emotional state which arises in respect of persons or places never fully present nor fully absent. Certainly you remember what you miss, and you miss because you remember, but the condition of missing is not to be confounded with memory but rather suspended in the in-between. Missing holds you in a state of intensity, less concerned with particular images (which would only be memory) and the state in which one neither possesses nor relinquishes an emotional hold. Therefore, the work is not about building the viewer's empathy for objects or representations, or the construction of abject or sorry conditions. Marti knows better than to depict recognizable persons or places, or even things, which may have no personal connections to a potential viewer. Missing is, instead, expressed as a state of detachment that flows in the flood of feeling that exists between presence and absence; less represented than captured in the ripples of light across the mutable surface of Marti's reflector-studded fabric. That the red discs yield to an inclusion of some white reflectors to the right of the

field, sets the eye to drift, almost unconsciously, from one side to another. It's as if the fabric shook itself out in modulations of emotion.

Marti's notion of missing, therefore, blazes with an intensity without representation. This is why he refuses the fixity of images, and even the painterly surface, itself. The application of expressive planes of colour to the surface of a canvas, for example, even in the hands of such masters as Tapiès or Rothko, still binds emotion to ontic substance. Marti's fabric resists all formal attachment; he prefers to let his reflectors float, suspended from above, catching the light to signal the transient impressionability of an emotional state.

Thus, while Marti's gigantic drape could be said to be a thing-in-itself, hung or shaken out over the balcony, it still, in a sense, occupies the in-between state of a fabric, registering the impressions of the light, and being of little consequence in itself. That's part of the charm of "Missing Spain": larger than life, oversized, abundantly scintillating, the work is technically a mere scrap of blown-up, barely meaningful, sequined detail exaggerated into a grandiose and eloquent sweep. One of its more humorous paradoxes is that it effortlessly evokes the insubstantial intensity of a serious emotion through a wisp of "fabric" constructed of the most unsartorial of materials in heavy plastic sheeting, road reflectors and metal screws. You might not be able scrunch or crease the fabric of Marti's Spain in the palm of your hand - it's the stuff of raiment for more than mere mortals - but the point is that it's a fabric of the imaginary. Dazzling, unfettered and possibly giving the illusion of fluttering in the gallery's reflected light, it evinces the heady emotions of a missing which doesn't have to be sad.

Notes.

1. Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins, 1976), 63.
2. Derrida, Jacques. *Glas*. (Paris: Galilée, 1974), 91; "The Double Session", *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. (Chicago: University Press, 1981), 213-5.