

Tanya Leighton

Press Release

Antonio Ballester Moreno
'THE MOUNTAIN, THE SKY, THE WIND, THE SKY.'

6 July – 17 August 2024

Preview: Friday 5 July, 6–8pm

Tanya Leighton, Berlin is pleased to present, 'THE MOUNTAIN, THE SKY, THE WIND, THE SKY.', featuring new paintings and sculptures by Madrid-based artist Antonio Ballester Moreno. The exhibition continues the artist's long-standing meditation on the physics of the natural world using radically simplified forms. This body of work focuses on landscape painting as an object of contemplation. In the West, the genre, in its modern sense, did not come into being until the 16th century when Renaissance humanism popularised the study of nature as an esoteric system of vital geometries. Prior to the 1500s, depictions of nature almost exclusively served as settings for the illustration of religious or state narratives. In other words, nature was merely a backdrop to the theatre of spiritual and political life. It was thus not until the revival of ancient Greek treatises on mathematics that nature suddenly became a theoretical question. It is from this historical moment that the exhibition departs.

To quote the artist, the works on view should be understood as 'a scenography of a landscape,' which is to say that they are not landscapes in a strict sense but rather – at a theatrical remove – an arrangement of elements to produce the impression of a place. In this scenography, every 'element has a relationship to others,' such as 'positive and negative, up and down, light and shadow or day and night.' It might be said that landscapes are reducible to groupings of terms whose meaning rests on their interdependence. The artist likens this interdependence to binomials, algebraic expressions that cannot be reduced to less than two terms (e.g., $x^2 + 2$). When subject to addition, binomials are *commutative*, namely they can be inverted without changing the sum of their parts ($2 + x^2$). Commutation belongs to a family of mathematical axioms with which operations with unknown variables can be solved.

Using algebra as an interpretive lens sheds light on Ballester Moreno's formal investigations. Take, for example, the paintings of what appear to be rolling hills simplified to iterated ribbons of reds, greens, greys, and yellows. One could imagine such strips of colour rearranged or 'commutated' ad infinitum without losing the evocation of a horizon. The artist's sun sculptures, likewise, reflect a similar interest in inversion by dividing a solar shape into positive and negative outlines, intersected along two axes. Metaphorically speaking, math renders legible how the artist's radical reduction of form operates on the level of a kind of propositional logic. It is as if each pairing of sculpture and painting were proofs of conditional statements, such as 'If p , then q '.

By pushing the analytical study of nature to the extreme, Ballester Moreno leaves his predecessors behind by probing the genre's inner axioms. In result, he takes his work to the level of the tradition's flashpoint. Indeed, even the succession of nouns in the exhibition's title suggest the potential to exhaustively reorder its terms to verify all

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possible permutations. The work, therefore, imagines the direction the landscape genre might have taken had it not become naturalised as a category of painting. Working against this naturalisation, Ballester Moreno's art returns the viewer to a time when landscapes were not just there to be painted but rather were a wellspring of hidden knowledge to be discovered.

Antonio Ballester Moreno (born in 1977 in Madrid) lives and works in Madrid. Ballester Moreno has developed a singular visual language deriving from the symbolism of nature, where stars, the sun, vegetation, or water, are conveyed in vibrant hues of red, blue, green and yellow.

Selected solo exhibitions include 'Nubes (verde)' at Maisterravalbuena, Madrid in 2023; 'What Can Be Seen From Here' at Fundación Cerezales Antonino y Cinia, León and 'ANOTHER DAY' at Tanya Leighton, Los Angeles in 2022; 'Autoconstrucción. Piezas Sueltas. Juego y Experiencia' at ARTIUM – Basque Museum of Contemporary Art, Vitoria and 'DAY' at Tanya Leighton, Berlin in 2021; 'Ánfora, grotesco, armazón, maniquí' at Museo Patio Herreriano, Valladolid in 2019; and La Casa Encendida, Madrid in 2017 which was accompanied by his first comprehensive monograph, '¡Vivan los campos libres de España!'. He also curated part of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo in 2019.

His works are held in numerous public and private collections internationally, including CIFO – Colección Ella Fontanals Cisneros, Miami; TBA21 – Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Madrid; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Helga de Alvear Collection, Cáceres; Banco de España Collection, Madrid; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla, León; Olbricht Collection, Berlin, and CA2M – Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid.

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The gallery is open Tuesday – Saturday, 11–6pm and by appointment.