

TEMPLOS
DE BARRIO

— *Marcelo Pombo* —

THE SPARKLE

TEXT

— *Federico Baeza* —

1. PROLOGUE

Finding its way between agitating self-consciousness and sleepwalking automatism, Marcelo Pombo reads History and his story over and over again in an exhibition that unfolds as strangely as dreams: a series of successive stations holding particularly vivid, mystifying instants of contemplation, visionary images. The iconographies he has been treasuring throughout his extensive journey return once again but disruptively. What used to be two-dimensional gains shape now; the little gets scaled until getting disproportionately bigger. The inert is animated, shapeless extremities and iridescent heads of hair grow from it. The garish is dulled and the crudely dreary now shimmers with a blinding light.

2. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM

That's how Pombo named the first scene, in this road everything is evoking something else, just like a fable. Art history occupied this setting with free-falling, huge rocky blocks, rearing horses in belligerent contortions and bold flames devouring the city. It is well known that the fall of the temple of Jerusalem happened twice: the first time in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II, the second time by roman legions under the order of the emperor Titus. According to Hebrew tradition the third temple will rise upon the coming of the Messiah. Now the ruins were restructured for a television set that could be used for a game show with music performances. This place would provide for simple and idiotic bliss for adults and children alike, as if it were a return to the first episodes of children's television show from the 90s *El Show de Xuxa*, something dearly beloved in Pombo's imagination. Holding from the lighting grid, huge boxes with gifts would fall for the joy of the little ones. Carefully crafted packages embellished with pretty and cheap stuff, outsider dreams of immediate opulence. There's almost no need to point at the omnipresence of this pattern in Pombo's career ever since his first figurations in the mid-'90s, but it's also been stubbornly persisting in more recent works in which gifts fall from a stormy sky, like endowments coming from salvific well-being. The third Jerusalem temple rises again as a stage of glowing party favors.

3. BETHLEHEM MIST IN THE RIACHUELO

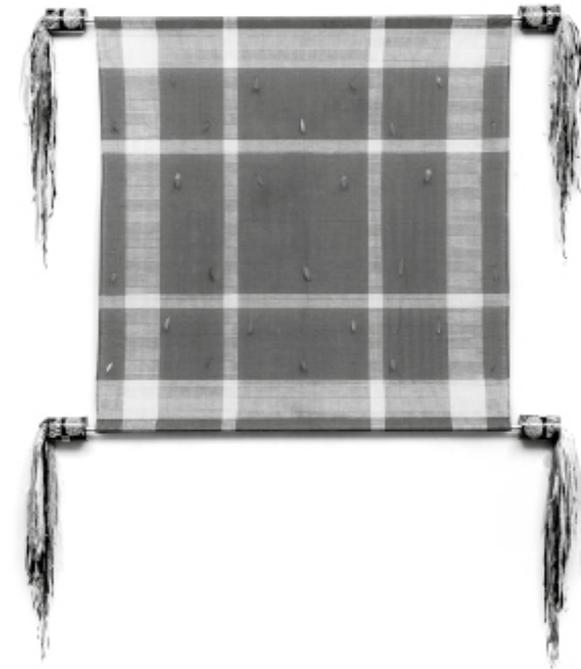
A Bethlehem distilling local color: Pombo's universe of references goes from the film farce starring Olinda Bozán, *Bruma del Riachuelo*, which narrates the vicissitudes of an abandoned woman; stops at Edmundo Rivero's tango, "Niebla en el Riachuelo", which mourns love lost in the corner of an old brigantine; and recalls *Misas herejes* by Evaristo Carriego, a folk culture bible. It starts to become clear which are the chosen people to roam in misery and obtain redemption in this parable. The core of the story takes place in a low height enclosure, with the roof covered by cardboards dotted with tiny styrofoam balls; the reference to the classic *Navidad en San Francisco Solano* (1991) is obvious. It is actually Christmas Eve, and inside the manger magnificent geometrical figures glow, taking the place of popular Christian representations, going through the most magnificent of them all—a brick covered in red glitter, the baby. This episode is not any less candid than the previous station, it is also a modest, pop, silly and emotional story. Something simple to remember. A beautiful special being with a pure heart is born amidst misery to redeem the world. This brick works as a cornerstone, as the center of the narrative, as the instance of transformation: from the profane mud to the iridescent shine of glitter.



Marcelo Pombo. *Caja regalo*, 1996
Cardboard box covered with wrapping paper,
acetate bows and acrylic paint. 24 x 9.5 x 9 cm

4. NEIGHBORHOOD TEMPLES

Finally, like a set of chinese boxes, the itinerary ends in a final enclosure, very wide, which itself contains small miniature temples. All with their respective spells: *Templo de la caca encantada* (“Temple of enchanted poop”), *Templo del ladrillo de oro* (“Temple of the golden brick”), *Templo de las golosinas raras* (“Temple of weird candy”), *Templo del paisaje divino* (“Temple of the divine landscape”), *Templo de María* (“Temple of Mary”) and *Templo de las exquisiteces* (“Temple of delicacies”). One might think they are miniature rooms of small-scale theaters. They also recall the floating shacks of his enamels from the 2000s. These figurations were the result of the juxtaposing between abstract geometry and metaphysical landscapes. Roberta Smith once said, while briefly reviewing one of Pombo’s exhibitions, that within his work the irreconcilable coexisted: Josef Albers’ delicate geometry along with Salvador Dalí’s oneiric paraphernalia. With his wigs and various fascinators these temples are displayed to be seen as animated beings which, in turn, contain other equally unusual beings on their inside. The commitment in his elaboration, the ornamentation on his surfaces, the vividness of his colors show them as delicious candies, exceptional delicacies, the final award after a difficult transit: a reconfigured mana. In the same room these beings live together with another ghostly, almost alien one. It’s a dark tapestry with green sparkles. In Pombo’s visual encyclopedia this character can be linked to one of his works from the beginnings of the ‘90s, *Mantel* (1990). Here, the process of interfering in the geometrical design with the presence of a prosaic object of certain festive and at the same time melancholic mood had already become evident. During these years, his objects posed between ready-mades and folk handcrafts; they stemmed from his modest and most frequent consumptions. Over this blanket he had devotedly cooked a few leaves made of plastic from bleach bottles. With these simple things he had built a sacred home altar.



Marcelo Pombo. *Mantel*, 1990
Plastic appliqués sewn on cotton tablecloth,
cans of peas and plastic fringes. 180 x 180 cm

5. TRANSMUTATION

Recently, while chatting with Pombo in his studio, he confessed to me that to him creating art was always like doing drag: a state of transfiguration and arousal, obtaining an experience of instant exuberance. Not feeling particularly beautiful he felt glamorous. Not having money he believed he was rich. Glitter, that omnipresent Ariadne's thread in his career, transformed into gold. That way he got to turn injury into pride, sadness into happiness; ultimately, the promise of a different life that gets realized in the closest here and now. Through this process, a task which belongs to art and religions, he allowed himself to disrupt sexual, gender and class divisions and invert every classification. In his visionary, hallucinatory image, the advent of the inversion of every order is happening right now.

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Translation: Fabrizio Arias Lippo.
Graphic design: Laura Escobar