

JORGE TACLA

NOHRA HAIME GALLERY

Since Cézanne, landscape painting has involved two seemingly disparate tasks. One is to demonstrate that perception cannot take the most ordinary appearances of nature for granted. Indeed, analytic painting dissolves the apparent self-evidence and solidity of the natural into a matrix of unanticipated, inarticulate details, revealing an utterly alien reality. Such "depth" perception is dizzying; it foregrounds the permanent strangeness, the indifference, the "supernaturalness" of the natural. On the other hand, the best avant-garde landscape painting also demonstrates, however unwittingly, what Spinoza called "the union of mind and the whole of nature." This "mysticism" is not simply another instance of the pathetic fallacy, or of pathological projection, but, rather, an oblique acknowledgment that we are, after all, creatures of nature, in elemental if unconscious relationship to it. Jorge Tacla's imagery fascinates because it seamlessly fuses our sense of estrangement from, and our affinity with, the landscape, making it freshly enchanting and defying its appropriation as raw material for mundane use. Tacla's X-ray vision transforms nature into something at once memorable and mysterious, in the twilight zone of the afterimage, as though only in that mental space could it find refuge.

Tacla's landscapes are simultaneously esthetic phenomena—rushes of gestures, each a peculiarly expressive chance configuration, agitated as though in unconscious recognition of the transience of their existence—and quasi-realistic units of a rough terrain stretching indefinitely toward a very distant horizon. More or less in the middle of the canvas, a section of the scene is transfigured—highlighted and lifted out of the otherwise colorless, comparatively grim context by the addition of a blurred bit of color, framed in a square of collaged canvas. The color is as raw as the terrain; the liberal use of white startling in the shadow-like context.

The titles of Tacla's paintings often contain the words "elemental" or "fundamental," as in *Elemental Investigations* and *Fundamental References* (all works 1991), revealing his obsession with the landscape of his native Chile. A kind of perceptual epiphany occurs, but also a peculiar conceptualization of an instinctively felt landscape, the ultimate emotional meaning of which remains unclear to the artist himself. The enigmatic details of the terrain mirror the details of his own mind, as though he had unwittingly painted the ridges and folds of his brain, in metaphoric acknowledgment of the persistence of the memories of his homeland.

Tacla originally exiled himself from Chile because of Augusto Pinochet's inhumane tyranny. Now he cannot return there permanently, however much Chile has changed politically, because it is more alive in fantasy than in reality, existing only in a purgatory of ambivalence. In the end, Tacla's work is a landscape neither of nature nor of the mind; rather, it resides in that elegant limbo of art about art. Ultimately, his art is a critique of the nostalgia for the artist-hero conquering nature—of the refusal to see the bleakness, futility, and intransigence of the terrain. Picking at the unhealable wound Chile has inflicted on him, Tacla's paintings seem to say that landscape resists one at every intellectual and emotional step: it is a dubious territory—an unbearable space of exile to which we are all doomed.

—DK

By Donald Kuspit



Jorge Tacla, *Elemental Notes*, 1991,
oil on jute, 70 x 59".