

Ignasi Aballí

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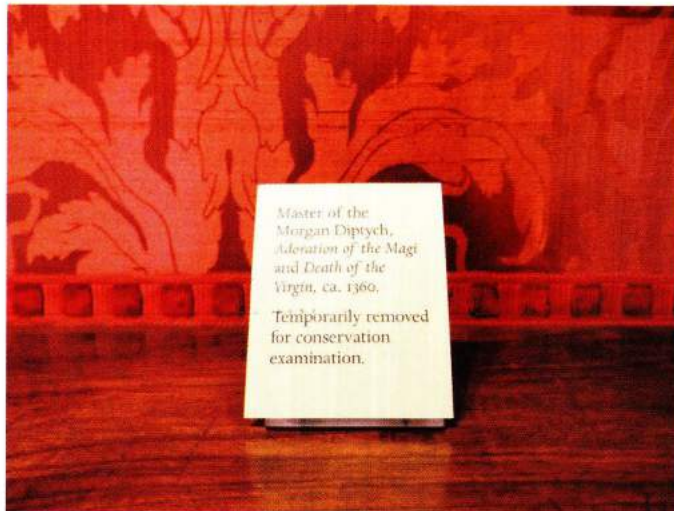
From the first, Catalan artist Ignasi Aballí has questioned the notion that painting is an eminently visual device. He began working at the end of the 1980s, when the weariness produced by the painting overflow of that decade impelled many artists to reflect not so much upon what was to be seen but rather upon the conceptual framework that made it visible. For Aballí, this led to a practice based more on suggestion than on explicit presence, in which painting was active as an idea and not as a physical entity, and images were to belong to the realm of the mind rather than to that of the eye. Aballí began to paint without painting, so to speak, focusing more on the operation's hidden inner processes, eventually relegating traditional activity in the medium to the sidelines.

Following an outstanding retrospective at Madrid's Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in 2015–16, Aballí presented a group of recent works in Berlin under the illuminating title "Something Is Missing." And in fact, something is always missing in Aballí's work. Linguistically paradoxical and formally elusive, his recent output takes invisibility as its major subject, one that, oddly enough, the artist often turns into tangible objects. Thus, *Double Broken Glass* (all works 2016) consists of a glass vitrine showing randomly distributed fragments of a photograph of a broken pane. The fragments of the photograph do not match the broken pieces of glass that were photographed; if they did, we would not be able to visually verify that the glass was broken. The complexity inherent to the work is obvious, and it neatly underscores one of Aballí's recurrent topics: the will to represent and to acquire visual awareness of invisibility, of which transparency has long been emblematic in his work.

A set of medium-format framed photographs from the series "Something Is Missing" formed a frieze running around the exhibition

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Ignasi Aballí,
Something Is Missing
V, 2016, ink-jet print
on paper, 18½ ×
23¾". From the
series "Something Is
Missing," 2016.



space. These unfolded as a linguistic game, presenting a void of images that are nonetheless true visualizations of lack: photographs of labels explaining the absence of various paintings in different museums due to the works' being under restoration or on loan. Signifier and signified are playfully inverted, and something tangential is made to be the constitutive core of the work. Thus, "Attempt of Reconstruction" consists of glass objects arrayed on a row of shelves. They look like lab equipment, yet also appear so fragile that you feel they could crack under nothing more than the force of your gaze. And indeed they have cracked; Aballí has glued the fragments back together, rendering them relatively whole though in fact utterly useless. The objects evoked earnest, time-consuming activity with the goal of soothing the melancholy occasioned by disappearance and oblivion. And this, as one may have expected, was only achievable through the preservation of the objects themselves.

At the very center of the show stood *To See the Ceiling*, a trolley with a mirrored base, which visitors could move around the space. The reflective surface recalled the mirrors used to view ceiling frescoes, but here there was no fresco, nothing to be seen but the blank gallery ceiling, for in Aballí's work, void is both iconography and medium.

—Javier Hontoria