

An almost speechless language

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The very long history of so-called “figure poems”, which go back 2000 years and are still composed today, passes alongside visual, concrete and sound poetry, typographic script and electronic texts distributed only online. However, one area persists that is difficult to define, despite all the exchanges, borrowings and interactions between the literary and visual arts. In this case, opting for the term “plastic arts” does not help much, because words, letters and pages that are visually perceived also possess a plastic quality. This grey area, which contains a considerable number of literary works that cannot be classified as plastic arts and in which the plastic arts refuse to belong to poetry or prose, even in a broad sense, is not simply a question of artistic genres or categories, even within the same “genre” (painting, sculpture, cinema, theatre or dance). The fact is that many writers and poets have laid claim to the plastic arts (for example the *Noigandres* group, the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, concrete poetry, Brion Gysin) and many plastic artists and painters are not averse to a possible confusion or fusion with the literary (among many others Dada, Futurism, Fluxus, and Marcel Broodthaers).

The artistic production of the twentieth century and the present day has thus experienced and continues to experience a strange phenomenon: as the grey area gets larger, the differences become more marked – or firmly defended, while shifting regularly between the undefined sides of the grey area. Does it really matter? After all, almost no one – artists, critics, the public, institutions – believes any longer in the existence of an essence of art or of the arts, or in some definitive law or rule of the genres that has long established practices. But that does not apply in the grey zone, especially in the current era, when most plastic artists believe that their production should be regarded as plastic, and most writers believe that their production should be regarded as literary. Once notions of essence, genre, and rules have been discarded, and even decisively rejected, what remains is the issue of forms and semantics: what might be called, despite its apparently outdated character, a poetic vision of the world. And we will not tumble into another impasse by speaking of a literary poetic vision or a plastic vision of the world, because it is without doubt here that this interweaving of differences takes place. To perceive, to understand, to interpret the world, reality and everything around us in a literary way, that is to say with text and language, is not the same

thing as to do so in a plastic way, that is to say generally with forms and materials that are not related to language. It is not that language is capable of grasping reality more accurately; it reconfigures it in a different way from plastic art. But what is really meant by “different”? Caught between the supporters of a linguistic concept of thought (such as Wittgenstein, who believed that it is impossible to think without language) and the supporters of a non-linguistic concept (such as Rudolf Arnheim, who defended the existence of “visual thinking”, devoid of words) we are still painfully struggling to find answers to the forms our representations may take: language, images, or a combination? – if indeed representations exist, since many authors contest the representationist thesis. This is not the place to enter into particular philosophical and neuroscientific debates – although they are directly connected to the issue at hand – so let us simply note that this remains an open question and that recent studies, such as those suggesting that an inability to name colours is no impediment to categorising and comprehending them, often leave us somewhat perplexed. Neither the art of the past nor modern or contemporary art has been able to resolve these conundrums, but it has regularly presented them to us, offering us – not only in conceptual terms, but in *material* terms – various versions.

The most explicit concerns precisely those works that simultaneously involve both the plastic arts and language. Does this mean reading something plastic or visualising language? When we read a book, a magazine or a newspaper, it is probably the plastic elements (format, colour, typography, paper, layout...) that strike us first, but we gradually cease to notice them, in favour of the *representation* of content. The mental representation then takes precedence over the intrinsic visualisation of all the other material elements, as though they were non-existent, almost invisible. In the case of “artists’ books”, and even more so in verbi-vocovisual artworks, the creators put a heavy emphasis on ambivalence, placing importance on the materials for their own sake.

In the series *Running dry* (ten drawings, 2005-2007) and *Degradation* (2007), João Onofre created *forms*, letters that are drawn rather than written, in which it is immediately apparent that the meaning of what we are reading corresponds with what has been done: a phrase – “pen running dry” – has been drawn with one marker, clearly showing the ink petering out towards the end of the inscription. The verbal meaning is immediately understood, but this moment bears no relation to the time taken to draw the whole image. Understanding of the visual meaning is similarly immediate: it is instantly obvious that the ink is fading. If this was not apparent in a *plastic* sense – if the ink flowed steadily with the same strength through all the letters – the meaning of the sentence would in the end be incorrect or a contradiction. This

is true also of the drawing's orientation, from top to bottom, since the opposite – whereby, if it were drawn from bottom to top, the ink would fade away at the beginning of the sentence – would not correspond to the impetus of the verb “running” (an operation in progress, something produced, a development). This is not strictly true when the same process is followed, but this time the words “pen degradation” are drawn: these do not require a specific direction or semantics, whatever colours are used in the drawings. Yet the phrases “core degradation” and “bringing out the degradation” allow the coincidence of the plastic aspect and the meaning to be re-established. It must be noted, incidentally, that the drawing of a sentence with a marker that is gradually emptied of its ink, but whose meaning comprises no direct reference to the drawing, could not therefore result in the coincidence of semantics and forms. But this lack of verbi-visual concordance or correspondence is only apparent because of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign that unfailingly binds the signifier and the signified. Applying a similar principal, these different series of drawings play with extensions and expansions of the process of seeing, understanding and reading, stretched to a limit where it would seem possible to separate the signifier and the signified, while never reaching breaking point. It must be possible for the plastic sign and the visual sign to be read and understood simultaneously.

The word “tautology” has been used in connection with these series, in relation to their process and meaning, but this possible definition needs some clarification. In its current usage, it ought to be possible here to apply the word “tautology” – whose Greek root, *tauto logos*, means “saying the same thing” – since the final *image* repeats the *verbal* meaning, and vice versa. But if we are dealing with a *coincidence* of the verbal and the plastic, or the plastic and the verbal, can we really talk about repetition? We come back to the matter of temporality, as much in terms of the creator as of the receiver. It is more a question of a performative, in the sense that Austin described, since the author of the drawing, while he is drawing, is producing a written text whose meaning, once completed, will be exactly the same as the thing he has made. Strictly speaking, there is therefore no repetition: something is not being said that is the same as something else, because a single unique action has been carried out signifying exactly that unique action throughout its whole development, from start to finish. In most of the series, it is more a question of isomorphism, paired with isochronism, since the visual and the readable both have the same time span – for the receiver, not for the producer. If we look carefully at the etymology, tautology means more precisely “saying the same word” – ταυτό, from ὁ αὐτός (ο autos), “the same”, and λόγος (logos), “word” – and in this sense, our seeing-reading does indeed express the same word. But unless the author

subsequently puts himself in the position of receiver, he cannot repeat what he has not yet finished, and once the process is completed it takes on a performative nature.

As a comparison, most of Lawrence Weiner's works are not, for their author, either tautology in the sense described earlier, or performative in the sense used by Austin, since their execution is carried out by others. But for the receiver it is a matter of "saying the same word" while reading the work, and it becomes performative as a direct result of reading, since we read what we see and see what we read as part of the same process, and at the same time, as we see and as we read, we actualize the visual and the readable. To make a trivial comparison, the advertising slogan "100 % of our clients buy our products" is clearly a perfect example of tautology, very different from these artistic examples. Because to come back to the art works, is it really a question of the same thing or the same word?

Although they are completely interdependent and interconnected, the visible and the readable are nevertheless different in terms of their substance: drawing, visuality and image for the plastic sign; semantics, readability and concept for the linguistic sign. The ambivalences – not the ambiguities – that the artist is playing with emphasise at times the superpositions of the readable and the visible and at times their disparity, even their quasi-impossibility, as much in material as in intellectual terms. The *Black monochrome series* strongly inhibits us from seeing/reading the apparent description of what we are doing: "can you see me", "nothing much to offer", "something will come out of this" – fragments of phrases taken from a song. The six drawings of the *Camouflage series* are so successful at hiding what is indicated by their function that it is impossible to see clearly, at least in the first instance, what lies beneath them. Or, rather, we see and we read what is written, but it is not obvious to what some of the terms refer; until we realise that the words and numbers *camouflaged* within the overall typographic composition – "CVE-26 Sangamon; 11-A USS Saratoga; CL-40 Brooklyn; CV-9 Essex; Terror CM-5; Salem CM-11" – correspond to the real names of warships used by the US army in the Second World War. Parts of the drawings are covered by wide transparent strips, clearly recalling the war camouflage produced by many of that period's young artist recruits, some of whom would go on to become well-known painters of Abstract Expressionism.

The ambivalence generated by the juxtaposition of image and intellect, visible and legible, seeing and reading, brings us back to our earlier questions relating to the philosophy of language, especially the issue of knowing whether an image can be or can become a concept on a par with a concept arising out of language. In most of João Onofre's drawings, the letters and words – with their typography, their size, their format, their colours and their arrangement

– are also images, like all words and letters in any language. A drawing and a form are necessary so that the signification, even of a single letter, makes sense: in Ancient Greece the same term *graphein* was used to mean writing and drawing. But if we do not possess the graphic code (of Japanese, Hindi, Cyrillic, Greek, for example), they remain as images. Understanding the graphic code will create the ambivalence described above so that in the image of the letters, words and phrases – because these are also images – we will see and read meaning immediately, and above all we will not be able to prevent ourselves, without considerable effort, from *reading* the image that is presented. In these very specific circumstances, where images and languages are conflated while nevertheless being differentiated, the viewer will not experience the “twofold perception” that Richard Wollheim analysed in relation to the paintings of Manet (and any other painting, engraving, drawing or sculpture devoid of language or language signs), in which we can sometimes see and focus on the material elements of the painting (brushstrokes, grain, texture, thickness, colour nuances...) and sometimes see and focus on the image, for example the representation of a woman reclining or standing on a balcony. This type of perception – which Wollheim called *twofoldness* – is almost impossible in verbi-visual artworks, because – unless the linguistic codes are unknown – *seeing* an image of letters, words or phrases reconfigured in a plastic sense is inevitably and simultaneously also *reading* the letters, words and phrases for what they are. In paintings (that contain no language elements) Wollheim makes a distinction between *seeing-in* and *seeing-as*: we *see in* the dabs of paint, brush strokes and marks, a form *seen as* that of a woman, a battle scene or a landscape. As long as we perceive and recognise the fragment of a letter or a word, a diacritic sign, the slightest comma in an ancient, modern or contemporary art work, we inevitably perceive, see and read that form/image not as being some other thing, but the very thing that is self-designating. This is where the very great difference lies between language signs and strictly visual signs, because the “twofold meaning” of language allows it to refer to other things while referring to itself. Understood in this way, language’s auto-reflexivity consists in saying (writing, speaking, pronouncing) that it is self-referential through the very fact of saying (writing, speaking, pronouncing).

The series *Five Words in a Line* displays the content and enables us to read it, as well as presenting the description of the text describing what it is, describing itself as it is and why it is so. Once again, but in another variant, the coincidence of the visible and the readable, of form and meaning, of material and conceptual in this series seems to lean towards tautology, although it is more a question of playing with linguistic self-reference while inevitably abandoning a potential self-reference of the whole to the notion of image. If the text were to

begin by proposing that “This is an image of forty-eight words...” – and, more precisely, “This is an image of fifty-two words...”–, this would be equally true, relative to our reading-seeing, but would shift the signification towards the image of words and no longer, or not only, towards the abstract, conceptual or intellectual signification that emerges from reading. In fact, it is not a matter of reading a text, or reading only a text, but of looking at the image of a text that presents itself to be read as a text in an image, which is thus an image. Naturally, the artist knows this perfectly well, but plays with the ambivalence between image and text, which is clearly demonstrated in the logos at the end of the phrase which accompany the text(-image), and which, by nature and by definition, are at the same time both text and image. These logos are moreover mischievously described by the name of their brand, by the number of letters contained in their name (no.1), or simply by the letter that is at the same time the name, the text, the image and what is designated as a “letter” in the text-image (no. 5). It should also be noted that the number of words changes slightly so as to harmonise with the self-description, and that the logo itself – equally mischievously – is not counted as a word, although it is referred to implicitly or explicitly throughout the reading, since everything that has just been read is literally the product of the object whose brand is identified by its logo.

We may find here some of the references, whether plastic (Bruce Nauman, Douglas Huebler, Edward Ruscha) or literary (Gertrude Stein), that contribute to João Onofre’s artistic background, in the same way as sound and music, in which methods of self-designation, auto-reflexivity, and even citation, reassembly or renewal are also explored, methods equally used by the present artist. Staying with some of the elements of João Onofre’s work, among many others, two are particularly striking: the disproportion between means and ends; and the absence of speech (with rare exceptions). The two artistic positions are very often linked.

To achieve his aims and to demonstrate in an almost obsessional way that everything in art operates according to the theory and practice of “what you see is what you see” and “what you hear is what you hear” – another form of tautology, so to speak – João Onofre does not shrink from any difficulty or challenge, even if it means that his approach sometimes borders on the bizarre, the incongruous, the outrageous, the unreasonable, even the absurd. It is impossible not to admire and be astonished by the use of a crane to move a nine metre sailing boat over the rooftops, in the middle of town, in order to place it in a ten metre swimming pool filled with water, in which it barely fits, as could be and indeed was foreseen: considerable material and human resources were used for a fairly otiose outcome (*Untitled (SUN 2500)*, 2010). Acts like these, at first sight as completely gratuitous as they are futile –

in this respect close to those undertaken by Fischli/Weiss or Roman Signer – have been a feature of João Onofre’s work since the start of his career, for example with *Untitled (we will never be boring)*, 1997.

One of the defining characteristics of art is play for its own sake, pointlessness, absence of functionality, a significant diminution or even complete absence of any useful value, preferring a gesture that is gratuitous, free, disinterested and aimless: all this for nothing more than the “beauty of the act”. This is what is achieved, for example, by a man in *Nothing will go wrong* (2000), who balances on his hands on a traffic light mast, in an acrobatic act that is as ephemeral as it is whimsical and frivolous. In *Pas d’action* (2002), professional dancers are required to stand still for several minutes in *pointe* and *demi-pointe* positions. These are customary exercise postures but, as a banal demonstration of a banal act, they do not go very far, the “action” being of the most limited kind, as in fact is explained by the word “pas” [*no* or *not*, in French] in the title, which at the same time refers to a foot’s movement and expresses a negative.

Most of João Onofre’s work treads a thin line between failure, hyperbole, childishness and arrogance, aptly illustrating the passage in Ecclesiastes: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity”. The original vanity is that Qoheleth’s text is known worldwide, yet has not had much influence on the thinking and practice of the humans to whom it is addressed, which both validates the text and demonstrates the deep meaning of its words. Manoeuvring between success, efficacy and fulfilment, and fiasco, bankruptcy and failure, João Onofre must however – if he wants to show this struggle clearly – paradoxically be meticulous in completing his programme, with all its uncertain repercussions. Such ways of being and doing were summed up by Paul Watzlawick in the formula and eponymous essay title *How to Fail Most Successfully*. In fact, the viewer is surprised as well as torn between and by the formal and plastic rigour of João Onofre’s works, and their futility and flaws, all occurring simultaneously. To “succeed at failure” requires preparation, reflection, organisation and planning, so that nothing is left to chance even in the knowledge that this position is in itself risky, bordering on untenable and impossible. Despite all these epistemological, psychophysical, material, financial, plastic and aesthetic obstacles, Onofre stays the course, imagining that all this can be achieved at the same time. The biggest surprise is that in putting it into practice in a concrete sense, he delivers the essence of the apparent contradiction: succeeding at failure. To this end, he relies on a variety of processes which have in common a strategy of circumvention and evasion.

The most obvious, but almost the most enigmatic strategy, bringing us back to our questions about language, is that above all nothing should be told, spoken or said in words, in the sense of words spoken out loud, if not live, because they are recorded in the art works. Even better, there should be no talk at all. Some film references – *Untitled (Martha)*, 1998; *Untitled (L'Eclisse)*, 1999, respectively taken and modified from the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Michelangelo Antonioni – are given no sound track by Onofre, and as in many other works, even those with sound (*Untitled*, 1998 in which a man and a woman fall on each other), no one speaks... out loud. All these actions say, signify, suggest and signal many very concrete things. As experience tells us, the slightest action can *speak* more loudly (in a positive or a negative sense) than any long speech. In the few instances when a word is spoken out loud (via the recording), this is always staged by Onofre and is presented clearly as a piece of theatrical or cinematographic artifice, a word representing its own representation, and thus a *mise en abyme*, as in *Thomas Dekker an interview* (2006). In *Casting* (2000), young male and female models take turns to say one of the last phrases spoken in Roberto Rossellini's film, *Stromboli* (1950): "Che io abbia la forza, la convinzione e il coraggio". Even though we cannot make any assumptions about the past, present or future lives of these people, who are all beautiful, exquisite, dressed in the latest fashion, they do not seem to suffer in the way that the film character suffered. But both cases are fictions, and it is possible that these young people will suffer just as much, if not more, in reality than the fiction projects in an imaginary context.

Using other bodies, whether they be younger, or differing in their gestures, poses, attitudes, ways of being and doing, as well as in their language, to embody the essence of other words produced by other bodies belonging to other periods and aesthetics, creates something strange in the language itself. This is an immediate reminder that a word is made of flesh, an emotive charge, a weight, that it has a unique range, rhythm and tone. Thus, in *Untitled (N'en Finit Plus)*, from 2010-2011, a young woman, Beatriz Mateus, sings *a cappella* an old Petula Clark song, "La nuit n'en finit plus" (1964). Through her body, her voice and her position at the bottom of a hole dug in the ground – here too considerable means are used, literally and figuratively, to displace meaning – she delivers a very strange experience, made more interesting in fact by the absence of orchestra, instruments or any sound other than her lone voice. Conversely, the song "Dava Tudo" is embodied, for a while, by João Onofre in the video *Untitled (Original orchestrated ersatz light version)*, 2010-2011, which carries his name insofar as the artist, always seeking a way to succeed at failing, sings poorly and is replaced rather quickly in the video by its true creative embodiment, Adelaide Ferreira. It is

incomparable. It is possible to dislike this song, the words (rather insipid, written by the singer) or the music, but the fact remains that Adelaide Ferreira has an extraordinary voice. Here too, the disproportionate mismatch between the commissioning of a symphony orchestra and this type of song is surprising: either too little or not enough. It is true that Pierre Boulez conducted some material by Frank Zappa, *The Perfect Stranger* (1984), but “Dava Tudo” is not Gustav Mahler, although it must be said that the words of so-called classical music, including contemporary works, are rarely very high quality either – Wilhem Müller’s poems for Schubert’s *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*, 1827) have certainly aged. Similarly, is it not incongruous to ask Lisbon University’s chamber choir to sing – or rather to provide sounds and onomatopoeia – the song “The Robots” from an album by Kraftwerk (another mismatch)?

It seems that the goal is not to attempt a mixture of genres, to make connections between serious and popular music, to show that good and bad music have always existed in the various fields of musical production, but that in the end it is rather a question, with a few rare exceptions throughout the work, of continually seeking ways to avoid speech. There is printing, writing, reading, performing actions, singing, but almost no speaking. Songs take precedence over all other forms of expression, since it is even possible to theorise about conceptual art through singing (*Catriona Shaw sings Baldessari sings LeWitt re-edit Like a Virgin extended version*, 2003). Singing is therefore a way of saying, of pronouncing, of producing meaning without having to produce words. Songs are of course made from words in the form of lyrics (*letra* in Portuguese), but not speech (*palavra* in Portuguese). This represents a sort of retreat from the immediate, turbulent and chaotic world, enabled by a displacement of the verbi-voco-visual rhythm of which it is composed and from which, however, it is impossible to escape, as Qoheleth observed: “All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.” (Ecc.1:8). In fact, the issue is even more complex for a visual artist, unless the question of (re)presentation, or the presence of seeing and hearing, is resolved, not by speech but by the visibility of the image and the audibility of the sound and the song; and still more in Onofre’s case by the readable/visible element of the sound and auditive images. No more saying, no more speaking: just showing. Thus, Onofre’s work shows images of couples who are “unable to communicate” – a commonplace issue, but no less timeless for that – and making contact without words; visual contacts, but without touch or speech; we hear songs that deal with abandonment, incomprehension, doubt, failed love, this time with an excess of words but without speech. In many cases hearing replaces showing, including the almost oxymoronic sound installation *Untitled* (2016), in which all that can be heard is the breathing of the

musician Carlos Paredes, rather than his guitar, an instrument for which he was widely known and admired as both composer and performer. The breathing is drawn from the five albums recorded in studio, and here takes the place of music, as if it were its flip side, its sound negative, while evoking a life that is now over, yet at the same time, as we listen to it, so close, so intimate. For Onofre, humanity is not so much about *logos*, the word, or the *eikon*, the image, as about the sung language, the language without speech, even a simple breath.

Astonishingly, Wittgenstein did not explore this possibility, preferring the idea that “if we can’t say it we can show it”, even though in some passages concerning music and poetic reading, he could clearly see that the sense of words is also dependent on sound, musicality, scansion and rhythm. Showing meaning through images, sounds and songs, is a method that has long been a part of our modern world, but with what aim, to achieve what, for what result? Rightly or wrongly, images show powerful and terrible significations far more effectively than words or accounts. But Onofre never tires of contemplating Qoheleth’s well-known phrase, so redolent of John Cage (no doubt influenced by Zen Buddhism), “a time to keep silence and a time to speak” (Ecc.3:7). Although the second phase of this existential time frame is largely eliminated in the works of João Onofre, or rather is replaced, literally, with “a time to sing”, two contrasting but not mutually hostile artworks seem to illustrate this thesis, beginning with their titles: *VOX* (2015) and *Tacet* (2014).

The Latin term *vox* of course means “voice”, but also the sound produced by the voice as well as the variety of its range and intensity. In *VOX*, we hear, but hardly ever see – because he is hidden by an umbrella – a musician/singer, playing an instrument (a guitar) and making some vocal sounds... without words. *Tacet* – a Latin term, meaning “silence”, used in musical scores to indicate when a silence must be observed – is a direct reference to the work of John Cage, *4’33”*, but this time, the pianist, although he is *playing* Cage’s piece, sets fire to the piano: we see the instrument burning noisily and relentlessly. Setting fire to silence through an image is thus the counterpart of the sound from which part of the image that produces the sound (the *VOX* musician) has been removed. It should be noted that this kind of *auto-da-fé*, which is musical and auditive rather than text, book or language based, is actually carried through, and even though it may be a thrift shop piano, it is nevertheless a real instrument that is irrevocably destroyed. An instrument that produces sound and meaning. Silence is certainly a constituent of music, as it is of language, but *Tacet* goes as far as destroying an instrument and the silence intrinsic to it. When obliteration is complete, the time for silence has indeed come.

The time to be quiet, the time for silence, is generally the time of death, burials and cemeteries, those funeral ceremonies when it is precisely those lines from Ecclesiastes, cited above, that are read out. It is not immediately obvious how this fated and unavoidable aspect of existence connects to most of João Onofre's works. At first sight, or even after several viewings, there is nothing to suggest it. Yet references to cemeteries are present on the map that indicates their locations in Lisbon – *Untitled (Lisbon's authorized death locations)*, 2004 – and, more clearly, in the series of photographs *Every gravedigger in Lisbon* (2006), which shows standing gravediggers, positioned frontally in small groups, all wearing a commonplace item that creates a strong focal point in the images: a pair of sunglasses. It is these glasses that surprise, more than their smiles or the contentment shown by these people who live alongside the dead on a daily basis, handling them and carrying them. It would be insignificant if only some of them wore them; the fact that all of them are wearing them raises questions. They are clearly alive, real flesh and blood, but all those faces whose eyes cannot be seen are reminiscent of skulls.

Some of Onofre's works explicitly mention death or mortality, for instance *Box sized DIE featuring Sacred Sin* (2007-2008), a distorted reference to Tony Smith's sculpture of a black steel cube, also titled *Die* (1962), a play of words alluding to dice and death. It should be noted that Smith commissioned the making of this work verbally, by telephone, and he never executed any sketches or preliminary images. His voice and his verbal description were enough. Another form of language, Braille, in *Untitled (a tour in Auschwitz)*, 2005, represents the testimony of an extermination camp survivor – offering an optico-tactile image for those who cannot read the raised dots. For those who do understand Braille, the page is immediately eloquent and meaningful; this is one of the rare incidences in Onofre's work of a *word that is touched*, though still not a word that speaks. Some other linguistic forms, which function only in English, appear in *Acousmatic arrangement inside an invisible square*, 2013-2014, and *Untitled (bells tuned D.E.A.D.)*, 2017. The letters DEAD correspond to notes in the musical notation system: bells can therefore be chosen to produce the various notes and deliver, metaphorically, by means of a traditional notational language, a possible sound of death. This is exactly what happens in certain Christian rituals, inspiring John Donne's celebrated verses:

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
[...] any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
it tolls for thee.*

Meditation XVII, "No Man is an Island"
Devotions upon Emergent Occasions

An older work by Onofre, *Skull* (2003), is a simple fax page on which was written "everything disappears", a text that without doubt has since been fading away, as it described, prefiguring the fact that it would one day no longer be legible (other than in a reproduction). This can serve to complete – though the survey has not been exhaustive – this curious mesh of languages, songs and breaths that seek to evoke our human condition in its finitude and ineluctable destiny. The young woman singing at the bottom of the hole, moreover using words that affirm "the night never ends", is a bare metaphor for what awaits us all. But Qoheleth had already said it: "This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone." (Ecc.9:3). Across the millennia, we come back to tautology: the same situations, the same words.