These are epic works, figurative or abstract, in the richest forms of evocation they illustrate for us the weaving of myth and time, the weavings of myth in the creation of time. Against immense backgrounds in a panoramic density of colour, figures are cast in a scale of epic proportion. There for us to see in moments of transaction, of exchange, moments of flight or excitement; those moments retrospectively cast as symbolic enough to change our place in the world. We are invited to witness the integration of action and being in that mythical moment of the event by which history is written. Like Davila’s After Image series (2010), this exhibition continues to articulate the interface between myth and the bare presence of life. Each narrative work a snapshot of a moment to be found in a number of myths, personal or collective, from Nordic myths such as those depicted in Wagner’s Die Walküre to the story of Carmen Gallardo, an indigenous Mapuche Indian woman with whom Davila grew up. We find these moments in a cinematic realism of mythical time. Indeed, he says, discovering the conjunctions of these two forms, “the revelation of the parallel between early myths in the European tradition and the Mapuche people, opened a space for me.” It is that space which this exhibition both constructs and conveys.

Scene one is a fatal conversation where things are to be decided but we don’t know what they are: he is offering what is not his to give and she is seeing in him what is not there; a classic account of love. There too is a commercial aspect; she is being, in some way, sold. Amidst rich earth tones of the ground an indigenous woman squats in conference with a man wearing a white shirt and a top hat, hence someone in league with or working for the colonising nations. The sexuality of this event is evident: his genitals are exposed while her hands are covering her breasts.

Scene two: The woman is no longer an object of exchange but a more active agent. This is the moment in Wagnerian myth where the woman meets a stranger who comes to the door and the flash of excitement between them eclipses her husband who witnesses his own exclusion and loss. It transpires that the stranger is the woman’s brother, separated in infancy, and having drugged the husband they engage in a passionate night of love. When the husband comes to, he kills the brother and she flees into the forest; fleeing from something, she is complete despite the loss of her love. In the oceanic depth of the night she is not alone, carrying the company of her child. No longer part of everyday life, having knowingly embraced and bedded her brother. The birth of the hero from an incestuous union is a common thread in mythology. Nietzsche comments on this ancient theme that such
and passion. The materials by definition cannot be rendered of such subjects today is rare, maligned in the illusion (just as the installation of Monet’s work in the field of beauty, there where the incandescence of the image, is to depict this movement of yielding to force as a directive to introspection but to recognition of the presence of a viewer, the necessary means of recognizing a statement. Just as an inscription or inception requires the presence of a viewer in the room, we don’t talk to those who don’t believe in us. The stories Carmen Gallardo told Davila as a child were nurturing threads, myths from his childhood. She said to him, ‘I’ll talk to you but you have to believe’. More recently, she asked him to tell the story of the crossing, said to him, ‘I’ll talk to you but you have to believe’. More recently, she asked him to tell the story of the crossing, said to him, ‘I’ll talk to you but you have to believe’. More recently, she asked him to tell the story of the crossing, said to him, ‘I’ll talk to you but you have to believe’.

Scene four: In the detail of this painting the movement of the boy’s body and the moment of rapture captured on his face is extraordinary; it is that around which myths are written. Davila is able to paint sacred beauty within frames of social commentary, capturing at once the mythical and its role in structuring enjoyment. In this same painting we find an older phallic figure, caricatured to be wearing a Dionysian mask. The figure of the crafty outsider rendered in the style of Verdejo, a Chilean caricature from the 1930’s representing the wild peasant coming to work in the city of Santiago. This caricature, the political representation of one artist, captures a figure that appears in other places too; Greek representations of the non-Greek outsider in studies of the grotesque and deformed, or the Wagnerian depiction of the caretaker of the hero as from a lower caste or class, or the underlings working for the gods. Here the adolescent who has known neither parent, raised in the wild by this Wagnerian character Mime, is dancing by the fire. Scanning the epic movement, seeing the latter’s humongous penis is a visual joke, a comic moment of laughter: like the lower gods in Greek-Roman symbols of good luck. At the same time there is perhaps a menacing interest in his disturbing smirk.

We are liable to forget that for the Greeks the Delpic oracle’s injunction to ‘Know yourself’ wasn’t a directive to introspection but to recognition of the proportion and priority accorded to the real as other in the form of the gods. The epic theatre as a political spectacle of the polis was framed in reverence to the determining force of the gods, in recognition of how the jouissance of these others might wreck havoc in the lives of ordinary mortals like us. The figure of Dionysus, who embodies that havoc, was ever present as the figure to whom the spectacle of the theatre was dedicated. As Jean-Pierre Vernant points out, religion for the Greeks in fifth century Athens was integral to social and political life, any collective event whether public or private included aspects of a religious festival. The legendary hero of the epic is transferred to the theatrical stage where he (less often she) becomes a subject of debate, brought into dialogue with the chorus. When the hero is questioned by the chorus, the individual in the audience begins to likewise question himself: “it is the individual Greek in the audience who discovers himself to be a problem, in and through the presentation of the tragic drama”. Taken in by the theatrical illusion and touched by its presence yet nonetheless aware that this ‘presence’ marked rather an absence in everyday life, the spectator is also conscious that these figures were illusory simulations. ‘Tragedy thus opened up a new space in Greek culture, the space of the imaginary, experienced and understood as such, that is to say a human production stemming from pure artifice’.1

Myth, like a primal scene constituted retrospectively to the elements it includes, revolves around fantasy, unconscious and proximate to the juncture of symbolic and imaginary in the formation of the real, and what is that ultimately if not death—that which we cannot for ourselves imagine. Lacouze-Labarthe notes that “it is within the Dionysian that presence is in fact precluded” for death “timelessly and irreversibly carries off presence, dooming us to repetition”.2 Death is the unrepresentable, as Freud noted, the thing we cannot present to ourselves. It is precisely what cannot be internalized, and maybe this is what defines the tragic (what Bataille called dramatization): the ‘consciousness’ or even (it comes down to the same thing) the abjuration that there is nothing to do with death but dramatize it”3. Davila gives us the folding of the moment of the apprehension of destruction back into the field of beauty, there where the incandescence of the instant draws us into wonder. Perhaps the point of the conjunction, the link between narrative image and after image, is to depict this movement of yielding as force as sensation, passing from the finite to restore the infinite, to exist in or alongside the otherness of continuing sensation. Perhaps these works of mythic proportion have that function: to clothe the base brutality of life’s most harsh encounters in a way that allows for something else to become transmittable.

Alongside these four narrative works are two abstract After Image works that speak to those moments of creation where time stands still as its dimensions are taken and inscribed forever in another place. Then installed on the stage, a work of collaboration that in itself acts as a commentary on the symbolic in its interface with these other aspects of the imaginary and the real, that which is unrepresentable.

In a documentary by Pauline Sein (2011) Davila described how many of the teachers at the Catholic boys’ school he attended as a child in Santiago were German, having arrived in Chile after suffering trauma in the war. That trauma was visited on their students, passed on in instances of molestation he was aware of. (Some of these immigrants acted as advisors, conspiring with Pinochet and the CIA to organize the overthrow of Allende and the torture of the population, and one aspect of the real Davila addressed particularly in his early works, was the political dead and disappeared,

an offence against nature must have occurred “whenever prophetic and magical energies break the spell of present and future, the rigid law of individuation, and indeed the actual magic of nature.”2

Scene three: the woman is in flight and carrying a child. Her nudity is very particular, similar to the nudity depicted in ancient Greece: natural and without charge in the sense that she is not nude for any particular purpose, as an object of the gaze. Radiant green underlay, oceanic blue: the background becomes immense, as is the emotion of her gesture and presence. From the radiant heat of her feet, action is foregrounded. Her bigger legs and smaller arms, seen from a distance, are in proportion and deliver the movement and momentum of the body in flight. The child she is carrying in utero is peaceful, still, her movement allowed by the frame. The presence of the baby carried between the clarity of her intent and the heat of the passage of action. Yes, the child is dreaming — of the future, for he has as yet no past, only words. He is blonde, the child of a colonising force, the meeting of two tribes. Two oval shapes (that repeat throughout this installation) flank the figure of the woman with child. The object becomes here an emblem, absolutely economic, like a medallion in architecture or the emblems in Greek pottery around 600 BC where the flower was a symbol of nature.

The style and movement of this figure is based on Greek and Roman fresco painting, known from Roman copies of the Greek. Such frescoes were viewed in semi-lit, semi-sacred spaces that allowed one to believe in the illusion (just as the installation of Monet’s work in the Musee d’Orsay leads one into the play of clouds and time across the surface of the water), a circumstance here recreated to some degree in Ormond Hall. Seeing the image of a work in photographic reproduction, the experience of its presence is technologically reduced. Works of antiquity are diminished in photographic reproduction because the aura, scale and nuance of colour have disappeared. These elements animate our reception of a work, for in receiving an impression, we suspend an intellectual response to receive the image as iconic. The reception here of a woman in extreme moments, such as the dissolution of the modern state, was a tradition of Greek and Roman tragedy. The aesthetic rendering of such subjects today is rare, maligning in the age of the digital, where artwork mediated by technology cannot often reach this level of particularity and passion. The materials by definition cannot be manipulated to the degree of nuance and texture and the capacity for emotion is compromised. After the modern
the real of torture during the Pinocchio regime). The scene then moves to one of Santiago’s oldest churches and a painting, The Beholding of St. John by a Peruvian indigenous artist, Zapata Inga, from 1620. Davila reads the subversive force of the painting as it depicts a local Peruvian truth in the style of then contemporary Flemish painting: The skin tones and figure of John the Baptist represented with bands tied and in shackles signal the torture of indigenous Indians by the Spanish invaders along with the complicity of bourgeois culture depicted by the two well dressed people chatting in indifference to the murder before them and the ambiguous position of the priest outside the window. In viewing this painting we are caught by the moment of the upturned eyes of the figure beheaded. Davila discussed the impact this painting had on him as it brought into a visual frame through cobbled reference, the realities about him; the sadism of the teachers, the task of living between two cultures, Indian and Spanish, depicted through the intense rendition of experience in a manner that fascinated and frightened him as a child. The painting served as a model while transmitting paradoxically the Catholic message that the Other is marked as a threatening predator on the one hand and as a conduit to scenes of extraordinary wonder on the other. The narrative works in this series take up those themes in resonance with the colour and forms of the Peruvian work.

The two abstract After Image works capture something of a subjective moment, a study in the nuance of being and relationship, the manner in which consciousness dwells in the body. Consider for example, Untitled, 2011: vibrant movement of forms in flux with a colour; an impression of how matter organizes itself as a form escaping the signifier while animating its routines means is that the position of the Other is altered as his work navigates subjective and political history in an incessant meditation on experience. A radical shift to the depiction of women, from earlier figures of the phallic woman (where the real is contextualized in reference to the terror of the Pinocchio regime and then the vexations of modernity) to more recent portraits of women in the singularity of their own repose is indicative, a barometer of this shifting incarnation of the Other.

Love on the side of being (rather than the object linked to desire) is often represented as “hostile or foreign to the city and to religion ... reputed to be rebellious, forgetful, errant, unsignificant, and inassertible,” insofar as it both “challenges that which it must replace” and conceals this fundamental ambivalence. It is at once “the promise of completion – but a promise always disappearing – and the threat of decomposition, always imminent. An entire modern eroticism and an entire modern spirituality, those of romantic love, of savage love, of transgressive love, are determined according to this dialectic.” In this dialectic love encounters the impossible pain we have for life, another description of the real. Davila surveys this alongside the tragic condition wherein knowledge, and with it, desire, is dislocated from the site of its enunciation, in order to comment upon it.

Lacan’s later work moved to a consideration of the alliance between the signifier and jouissance, an alliance to which he gave name, returning to an ancient spelling of symptoms: it sinthome. The very individual particularity, the mark of a signifier by which the subject is born eclipsed, and the irreducible jouissance, that subtle form escaping the signifier while animating its routines together render us both particular and equal. What would such an alliance entail? The navigation of a different relation to the Other, whether a fault line in the Other is created to allow in some light or the subject ceases to identify with the lack in the Other, some space to manoeuvre is created. Previous constructions or fantasies built around the enigma of the mother’s jouissance start to fade as landscapes from another era, reference points that are no longer utterly engaging. The provenance of weaving, from symptom to sinthome, implies a belief in the structure as real, and its use in the name of particularity, subjectivity as a method of freedom that has not been statistically conceptualized and constrained, economically accounted for. With the sinthome, emphasis falls on a real element of the symptom that remains beyond the symbolic.

From temporal experience to the knowledge formalized as conscious, what is the unconscious but the memory of things forgotten? “A place that has been occupied is drawn, and it imprints in the subject the landmarks of its history. The history is not the history of his life but the history of the signifier, which acquires for the subject the value of direction.”10 Analysis then is the experience of a search, words and signifiers being found to navigate and circumscribe “what was ‘already known’ and ‘already there.’”11 Cormac Gallagher puts this rather succinctly in saying that life “is not a journey, there is no past and present, we have to deal with the sins of our fathers as if they were our own”. The tragic subject dramatizes the question of possession, the recognition of that which they know. Lacan comments on the uncontrollable truths we bear witness to in analysis, noting that “it is not desire that presses over knowledge, it is horror.” While taken up in the university, his discourse as Gallagher notes was intended not to remedy the ignorance of his audience by conveying knowledge; it aimed rather at what they already knew, at the unconscious knowledge that was always there. Emphasizing that speech is an event that is not a matter of philosophy or a moment of knowing, Lacan comments, “What you do, knows what you are, knows you.” The idea of the unconscious thus implies that even in attenuating circumstances, there is no pardon. “What you do is knowledge, completely determined.” Which is why, which is why the fact that it is determined by an articulation supported by the preceding generation in no way excuses you, since this only makes the saying, the saying of this knowledge, more hardened knowledge, as I might say. At the limit, a knowledge that was already there.” Davila has
always worked to contextualize this knowledge as the
ordering limit of experience. Moving from fascination
with dreams and other formations of the unconscious
to address the points impossible to speak marks a shift
from the unconscious as transferential to one that is real.
To read something impossible to say, the unconscious as
a text that is not necessarily written – might we not see
this as an endeavour marked throughout Davila’s work?
Lacan refers to the letter as littoral, “the edge of the hole
in knowledge”, and the symptom as something that does not
cease writing itself in the real, “a movement which is only
knowledge”, and the symptom as something that does not
exist, the centre is empty. This is a painting that captures
the mythical addressed to emerge in these works.

III

L

ike a jeweld that opens a portal, as a child would say; Juan Davila and Constanze Zikos worked
together to produce this painting that depicts a moment where signifiers are linked in a knotting effect
that allows us to see the effect of the symbolic. What would that mean, if not to say that we can elaborate
here the stitching of links, of representations across the field that thereby appears as a portal to the real. A portal
in the sense that the real is where death awakes, it depicts an uncanny repetition of the imagined colouring of an
earlier temple at Syracuse,\textsuperscript{14} we see turquoise, reds and shades of formalization providing perspective,
amment of being, of seeing, a paradigm of interior space.

The construction floating like a holographic form has clear elements that cannot be fixed; we see
the frame of a metaphorical construction along with moments of dislocation where the key pattern of
the border meets and overlaps, all of which produce a floating sense of wonder. The shimmer of metallic paint, of
the colour undulating along the border or between the forms, the oval shapes that appear almost to rotate, this
animation is associated with the forms and noble materials of a Venetian tableau. This painting was written in
quotation of what for want of a better term we might call a Venetian form: Organised not by artists but by
craftsmen, ancient pieces of marble, sculpture and mosaic plundered and recycled into a more modern Venice, to
appear on a wall of the main cathedral. The collaboration here, a marriage of two approaches, works off an
image of this tableau to depict a frame of the symbolic, the moment of condensation, a demonstration of repre-
sentation and artifice similarly applied to create a sacred shimmer.

The texture is given here in colour, metallic glow, pattern and subtlety of paint to illuminate this
image of this tableau to depict a frame of the symbolic, the moment of condensation, a demonstration of repre-
sentation and artifice similarly applied to create a sacred shimmer.

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Juan Davila & Constanze Zikos, Untitled 2012
Juan Davila
Untitled 2011
Oil on canvas
300 × 480 cm
Juan Davila
*Untitled 2012*
Oil on canvas
300 × 478 cm
Juan Davila
Untitled 2011
Oil on canvas
300 × 655 cm
Juan Davila
Untitled 2011
Oil on canvas
300 × 420 cm
Juan Davila
Untitled 2011
Oil on canvas
100 × 356 cm
Juan Davila & Constanze Zikos
*Untitled* 2012
Oil on canvas
300 x 667 cm
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Detail showing portrait of Kate Briggs
Juan Davila, Untitled 2012

Juan Davila painting in the Andes, Chile
Photo by Graeme Smith, courtesy of Felipe Claro and Bernarda Wunkhaus