

**Victor Ciato at Plan B**

by Adelina Cacio

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February ended with the beginning of a new project pursued by Plan B Gallery, consisting of a series of exhibitions which will feature the works of Victor Ciato. Born in 1938, the artist lives and works in Cluj and was, for many years, a professor with the painting department at the Cluj Art Academy. The starting point of the upcoming program of shows is the exhibition titled Moment 0, which presents the art public with 11 watercolours on paper, done by the artist in the late 1960s. Alongside the visual gesture which the viewer can easily interact with while strolling through the exhibition space (one of several located in the Paintbrushes Factory) the context from which these paintings stemmed serves their understanding even better. Therefore, going back about fifty years into an academic environment, which implied studying painting under the circumstances of a cultural dogma highly present in the socialist regime, we find Victor Ciato eager to break away from visual stereotypes as soon as he graduated from "Ion Andreescu" Institute of Fine Arts. On this note, after completing his formation and mastering the skills of a professional painter, the artist chooses to make a radical move at the beginning of his career – he chooses to start over. Today, the viewers find themselves facing this visual tabula rasa while witnessing the very founding of the forthcoming art of Victor Ciato.

On the pristine white gallery walls this series of humble chromatic markers reveal to the visiting public, step by step, the newly established grounds of this artist's attempt to revive the visual identity of his production. As similar as they are to one another, as far composition is concerned, the paintings individualize themselves by the sole gesture that generates this pattern of mostly vertical strokes. Judging by the recurrent nature of the way in which this process occurred, the abstract elements generating the image act like a matrix chosen to receive the unique and personal signature of the painter's brush. The chosen medium favours the immediacy of the result expected of this repetitive exercise, as watercolour requires the boldness of a straightforward brushstroke. As the outcome shows us, these directional patches of colour are at the same time airy and smothered, clear and diluted, steady and ambivalent, but all these elements were intended to look precisely in this manner. The artist clearly relied on this tedious routine in order to experience the sheer pleasure of applying paint onto a blank surface, of letting the simple and basic elements of an image "find" their own place in the empty space. He wanted to give colour itself a chance to act.

It's not at all uncommon for artists to feel the need to "reboot" their creative instincts. Some come to a point when even the smallest dot on a piece of paper makes them unbelievably overwhelmed, in which case the concept of "nothingness" becomes the most soothing notion for making the artist comfortable. We love to stare this echoing void in the face because it's our last shot at figuring out what's left of ourselves. Otherwise we get caught up in the erratic mess of our daily lives. On these grounds, complete and utter abstraction of an image is not pursued "for art's sake", but it aims to relocate the misplaced self. It's something done for the artist's sake.

This small sequence of untitled works is not meant to be seen as a statement, but as a complete lack of statement. It's the visual equivalent of somebody learning to speak all over again, word by word – or, in this case, stroke by stroke. Kazimir Malevici, at the high peak of modernism, found his "point zero" in the form of a black square. For Victor Ciato it was a handful of repeated, uneven forms. It's a neutral area where many artists have gone to essentialize or resuscitate what it is they consider to function as art. What is on display at Plan B Gallery is this painter's own version of what nothing looks like.