

## Benito Ekmekdjian: In Counterpoint

18 - 20 September, 2025  
at the Argentine Ambassador's Residence

"It is possible to memorise instrumental music, but it is impossible to recall a painting in its entirety. We remember what unfolds in sequence, not what is given all at once."

Luis Sagasti, *Una ofrenda musical*, 2017

This observation became the point of departure for Benito Ekmekdjian's *In Counterpoint*. Developed through a dialogue with Sagasti, the series asks what happens when painting borrows the temporality of music; when an image resists being apprehended in a single glance and instead demands succession, a choreography of the gaze that unfolds in time and space, leaving behind a sequence of impressions rather than a total image.

Installed in the ballroom of the Argentine Ambassador's Residence, four large canvases — *Breakup*, *Sweat*, *Presence*, and *Misery* — appear as distinct voices within a larger composition. These canvases were meant to exist together, yet were conceived and developed separately and in succession. Each asserts its own rhythm: dense layers or translucent washes, gestures that press forward or linger, tones that darken or open towards light. For Benito, everything appears during the act of painting; whatever he sees, reads, or listens to takes shape on the canvas.

*Breakup* speaks of rupture: the division of the canvas mirrors the artist's move from Argentina to the UK, where symbols of home and absence are refracted through colour and gesture, while also revealing his homage to Cy Twombly. In *Sweat*, Ekmekdjian returns to portraiture, reworking the cover of Slint's *Spiderland* into a fragmented stage where faces surface beneath a pale blue background; an image of fragility and nostalgia, which echoes Kuitca's

melancholic spaces. *Presence* anchors itself in sound, its speakers evoking music as an ever-present force, reverberating as both subject and structure. Finally, *Misery* closes the cycle. After months devoted to painting, this last work arrived as a *grand finale*. "Simplicity was the key to achieving a hard-hitting cohesive image," Benito notes. A portrait distilled to its essence, the painting stands as a full stop, or, in musical terms, a perfect cadence.

Like silence in music, the works find resonance in their pauses and intervals, in the negative spaces that hold the image in suspension. Emerging from fragments of personal archive, musical references, and restless impulses, they carry painting into the terrain of memory: partial, successive, always in motion. To engage with them is to walk, to let the gaze unfold as if following a line of melody.

*In Counterpoint*, memory is not a picture to be fixed but a flicker, a sequence of impressions: a timbre, a hue, a trace. The paintings remind us that memory composes itself with fragments, that to remember is to misremember. As Sagasti notes, even music lingers only in part, as a vibration that dissolves as it emerges. And yet, within this fragility, moments of alignment appear; flashes where the fragments briefly gather and suggest a whole. Perhaps it is here, in this oscillation between part and whole, that the gestures of memory carry within them the promise of totality.

List of artworks

1. *Conversation with Sagasti I: Breakup*, 2025, oil on canvas 156 x 234
2. *Conversation with Sagasti III: Sweat*, 2025, oil on canvas, 160 x 234 cm
3. *Conversation with Sagasti II: Presence*, 2025, oil on canvas, 160 x 234 cm
4. *Conversation with Sagasti IV: Misery*, 2025, oil on canvas, 160 x 234 cm

## Texto para Benito por Luis Sagasti

En el último minuto de la última escena de la película *Stalker*, de Andrei Tarkovsky, la hija del protagonista apoya la cabeza contra la mesa de una cocina; hay dos frascos, un vaso a medio llenar. Se la ve aburrida, acaso abrumada. La mesa vibra, en verdad toda la habitación parece vibrar. Descubrimos que el temblor es causado por el ferrocarril que pasa muy cerca de allí. El ronquido del tren crece, se hace plural y desacompasado; en un momento se adivina el coro de la *Novena sinfonía*. No durará mucho el borroso aleluya: ni bien lo advertimos comienza a desvanecerse; el tren prosigue su marcha, el ronquido recupera su compás. Así también, en el latigazo nervioso que dan los pájaros con su cabeza cuando buscan alimento podemos cifrar el lapso en que el universo se interroga y se imagina a sí mismo en nosotros antes de regresar a la silenciosa expansión de su mecánica. Uno solo de esos movimientos de cabeza contiene a cada obrero de la Gran Muralla y a Niels Bohr, el salto extasiado de los *Massai*, una presurosa despedida, los gatos de Louis Wain. Una orquesta toca para sí unos compases antes de desaparecer sin dejar el menor rastro, el universo ha sido cosmos por un momento, el pájaro remonta su vuelo. Y de manera inversa, pero también como un relámpago fortuito, nuestra conciencia se aleja de lo múltiple y desaparece en la gozosa unidad sin afueras; no sucede a menudo una vez abandonada la infancia; la relojería cardíaca de temores y deseos hace de nuestra rutina un mueble opaco lleno de ropa que no usaremos nunca. Pero también a veces, sabiéndose inalcanzables, el núcleo duro de nuestras experiencias pavonea su imprecisión frente a las costas del habla. Allí delante, esa canción de la que no nos queda una sola nota sino, cuanto más, el timbre de su ejecución y también una lámina visual, una geometría color pastel, lo que fuera que se encuentre al borde de manifestarse cuando la memoria se ha dado por vencido.

## Text for Benito by Luis Sagasti

In the last minute of the last scene of the film *Stalker*, by Andrei Tarkovsky, the protagonist's daughter rests her head against the kitchen table; there are two jars, a half-filled glass. She looks bored, perhaps overwhelmed. The table vibrates, in fact the whole room seems to vibrate. We discover that the tremor is caused by the railway that passes very close by. The rumble of the train grows, becomes plural and out of sync; at one point one can make out the chorus of the *Ninth Symphony*. The blurry hallelujah will not last long: as soon as we notice it, it begins to fade; the train continues on its way, the rumble regains its rhythm. So too, in the nervous jerk of the head that birds make when they search for food we can decipher the span in which the universe questions and imagines itself in us before returning to the silent expansion of its mechanics. A single one of those head movements contains every worker of the Great Wall and Niels Bohr, the ecstatic leap of the *Maasai*, a hasty farewell, the cats of Louis Wain. An orchestra plays a few bars to itself before disappearing without leaving the slightest trace, the universe has been cosmos for a moment, the bird resumes its flight. And inversely, but also like a fortuitous lightning flash, our consciousness moves away from the multiple and disappears into the joyous unity without outsides; it does not happen often once childhood has been left behind; the cardiac clockwork of fears and desires makes of our routine an opaque piece of furniture full of clothes we will never wear. But also sometimes, knowing itself unattainable, the hard core of our experiences flaunts its imprecision before the shores of speech. There ahead, that song of which not a single note remains but, at most, the timbre of its performance and also a visual sheet, a pastel-coloured geometry, whatever it was that stood on the verge of manifesting itself when memory has given up.

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