

A SKETCH OF THE HYPERBOLIC PAINTER

A guy pissing up a wall, right at the end of a crack. His expression has an element of complicity, it may even be defiant. Of course, he is not about to leave the job in hand. He looks towards our gaze, quite literally out of the corner of his eye. Without worrying about what might be happening around him in this strange place in which the architectural ruins and the metropolitan night are marked by two almost indescribable apparitions: a figure with a Flamenco guitar stuck into her chest, above half an orange, a spider's web, an ice-cream, a cigarette and some pictorial quotes in which we can detect the cubist representational strategy and another feminine "embodiment", with rounded forms, dressed in a costume that would seem to be based on the harlequin style. The shadow of the individual, passing a motion in the landscape of the suburbs, is elongated. Maybe what is happening behind his back is another eschatological projection, something that, as the title suggests, challenges us "without words".

Catachretic painting, with a juxtaposition of the heterogeneous, in a braiding of heroic dimension and of tone, marked by irony, a manifestation of an aesthetic plan where there is a constant reflective folding, which almost constitutes Quejido, in my opinion, as a master of the neo-Baroque. I am referring, in the terms of Calebrese, to his taste for distortion and perversion (the dystopias of the past or the proliferation of quotes), something which is truly out of place in a time of banal monumentalisation. In the same manner as his admired Velázquez, he paints the (very strange) scene of the painting, he turns composition into a heterotopia, situating it where there is no neat table of similarities and resemblances except a proliferation of references or rather, of allegories that establish surprising links between the signs.

In the undisciplined adventures of Manolo Quejido's paintings one will notice a drive towards a imagination that would be, at the same time, that of anyone (we might also say, that of no one, that anonymous epic, as Ignacio Castro said) but also that of a subject who accumulates lengthy experience of culture, an intensive memory that has to do with the question of the anxiety of influences (that declination, a clinamen which is a revisionist quotient to tradition). Painting that is full of drive and scheming, cunning plots, it is true to say that it is not seen so much as a celibate machine (that single state exemplified in Duchampian meta-irony) but rather a vertiginous family mechanism (series, similarities, relationships are an essential part of the aesthetic nature of Quejido's work). This lucid creator constantly casts his gaze on the horrors of history, he produces (instinctively) and in doing so shortcircuits the logic of production (institutional), he escapes from gloating (as is characteristic of reactive nihilism) over the magnificent past to overcome historic maladies in a confrontation with the present. Nietzsche already spoke of this, in the second of his untimely considerations, the urgency for history to be at the service of vital impulses, literally resulting in a despresentation of today, that is to say, showing a way out of the behaviourist labyrinth of the show culture, to our society of the amnesiac pact.

Manolo Quejido undoubtedly swims against the tide, he is completely out of time, a painter who is concerned with events and immediacy, with the texture of the mess around us and, of course, rooted in a dense dimension of time that enables one to see reality with a mixture of enthusiasm and distance. In fact, his paintings are like the event, or rather, that other thing: "Each time", writes Quejido. "that the coordinated, opaque, virulent state of rage collapses, one is released from oneself, without coordinates, transparent, radiant. Whatever is forgotten, the memory can bring it back. What memory cannot bring back is what is unmemorable. What is forgettable is therefore not memorable, what takes us nowhere. The event as the inconceivable. The between, the difference, the relationship. The creative vacuum. But this, although it is

not possible to totally vacate PAINTING, as PAINTING is always occupied by its existence as painting, what preoccupies PAINTING is not what occupies it, but rather what that lack of preoccupation by what is already occupied causes. All these unbearable things that happen, as they happen through the PAINTER, means that what is unbearable can be born by bearing itself. It is no longer something that happened, rather it is something that however much it may happen does not end up happening. It happens to you". Perhaps Quejido is talking, in his own way, about the same thing that concerned Kant when he analysed the transcendental principle, the purpose of nature, its law regarding the reflecting judgement, the judgement that produces pleasure by bringing two or more empirical and heterogeneous laws of nature together under a principle that encompasses them both. However, what for the philosopher is disinterested pleasure, for the painter is a revisiting, a return to the same by producing something that is different, an implication that is as passionate as it is thoughtful (think-paint) when things that happen happen to us. Named heterogeneity (the explicit reflection of Quejido's multiple styles) implies both the turbulent dynamics of desire and the radical experience of abandonment, a confidence that makes it possible to take "everything" and a wish to find a personal tonality of expression. "All art work", writes Ignacio Castro "is encoded through a new and binding transmutation of the blackness of the unknown into colour, something that the artist has certainly experienced himself. It is precisely from here, from a certain courage for emptiness - for "nothingness" or the "desert"- where his wisdom for colour was born. He has needed to be poor to the bones, to sink into muteness, to capture the colours from outside that vibrate there, in remote proximity". In his own way, he has returned once and again to that rusty fence, to the eschatological place so that, from there, he can recompose the topography of the painting, whether with flowers (thoughts), multicoloured clocks that hypnotise one's vision into chronological ramblings or, particularly, the dimension at the start which is marked by the blank canvass (Tabique) or the typewriter on which something tautological is etched on a conceptual loop (Regina). The fluid thoughts of Quejido, his ability to integrate melamorphic things inevitably leads him towards the image of bathers, to the riverbank on which, at least since Heraclitus, our identity is at stake.

The first thing that is reflected in the water is our nudity, that moving mirror is the territory of a powerful speculation, a thoughtful will. In a conversation with Kevin Power, Manolo Quejido pointed out that his vision is reflected, another dimension is involved, whether specular, photographic or pictorial, an incessant reflection that occurs in the studio which is literally a camera, "where the paintings are the prints or negatives resulting from the fusion of the inner experience of everything that is outside that concerns me, with the reproduction of the interior of the studio itself that has taken form on the basis of the functionality that is part of me". Manolo Quejido's series of paintings in 2001 does not beat about the bush, it eludes any attitude that is characteristic of players of hegemonic biennial exhibitions. The title, "La pintura" (Painting), which is almost a challenge in times of confusion and even of a certain fatigue or mental brine, tells us once again a passionate fable, the same one that obsessed Balzac when he wrote *The Unknown Masterpiece* and, of course, Dore Ashton when he brilliantly recreated Frehofer's delirium of burying the body of a naked woman with blurred abstract expressions, the marks of an inexplicable struggle.

The painter and model take it turns to be nude, but he even paints a woman who also lacks the protection of clothing. One must reach that absolute depth of skin and, at the same time, retrieve the mythical origin of painting: the drawing of the beloved's shadow on the wall. Quejido does not actually paint an artist painting a picture, what we see is a subject that seems to apply a brushstroke directly onto the other's body. The same

fiction is modulated in different ways, until it even reaches the point of complete abstraction (for example, in *Pintura XIV* (Painting XIV)). We insist once again that Quejido's paintings are full of references, they respond to exact plans or rather, they form travel maps. This creator blatantly shows cartography, he geometrically draws his sketches, aware, as he points out in *Zeoreo*, that that "coming and going of representation" means that the sketch is paradoxically completed and yet left open (perhaps this is what the map is for). His "influences" do not seem like hints, but rather like brilliant embodiments, like radical assumptions of particular (artistic) ways of looking at the world: "I don't want", says Quejido, "to lose a sense of where I am. For me, Picasso and Matisse are the two eyes whose depth makes me see Ingres and Tiziano behind Matisse, and Goya and El Greco behind Picasso."

"La Pintura VIII" (Painting VIII)

That madness of Pymalionism filled those who saw it with horror, Porbus could not contain himself and, touching the canvass, he said: "This is where our art on earth ends". With all this, in that tragic veiling, in that buried nudity there is something that forces one to carry on painting, a need to enlarge the universe of the figure, that beginning that is represented, according to Ángel Gabilondo, in paintings that have a structure of constant "emergence". The scene is canonical: the moment when the body is painted, the harsh encounter of the two subjects. In the mirror called *Cezanne I want to see Velázquez*. A whole plan". Quico Rivas is right when he stressed that Manolo Quejido's paintings (the bearable of the unbearable) are a continuous scheming (feverish and articulate), from his phenomenal *Taco*, that colossal dictionary in which one paints in all the different ways that one can (the ruler that twists and turns, the post-Euclidean flies that call the ZAJ group together, the letter on the unmade bed, the vertical chaos that springs up when one looks at the look in someone's eyes, etc.) to the caustic allegories, which he made in situ for his exhibition in the Centre del Carme in Valencia on *La Corona* (The Crown), *El Ejército* (The Army) and *La Banca* (Banks), hooded and faceless in the style of Jarry's *Ubu*. But we should bear in mind that for Quejido, above and below everything speakable, "are topology, places, situations, indifferences". Paint (desperately) connects with the world and (necessarily) with paint itself; "Manolo Quejido", say Catherine Francois and Santiago Auserón "extracts all the unformulated potential of paint, he lives on it and its history like a parasite, a traitor that prolongs it indefinitely" -. The imaginary hybrid of this creator (which José Luis Brea described as transconceptual) leads him to a kind of plain baroque, in which excesses and surfeits imply a singular concern for what is missing, for the rest, that is. Long ago in '66, in *La Codorniz*, a critic commented, with a certain amount of disgust, that Manolo Quejido had managed to frame the most "shameless underwear hung out in the neighbourhood courtyard". A.M. Campoy, also referring to the pieces that are to be presented by this painter in the Sala Arteluz, spoke of poverty and refuse collectors, of realities that shrink our soul, of Rimbaud who saturated the fingers of the delicers with poetry. The memory goes back to the poetry of the ragmen, the artistic intention as seeing what is excluded, what is not visible, widespread collateral damage. Quejido's obsessive gaze is not trapped by eschatological things, rather it gravitates towards hypertelic things (going beyond ends, in a lethal impetus of supplement, pretence and splendour, in an enormous code), in the excessive visual talent, in which his sense of humour and an awareness of the unfinished nature of the task are not lacking. "The Nutriben box", writes Juan Manuel Bonet, recalling a visit to Manolo Quejido, "has a sign on the lid that says (he shows it to me ironically, to me who he believes to be insensitive to the pop image): "the POP you will hear on opening this guarantees a

perfect seal”.

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Tres heridas todavía humeantes. (Three Wounds Still Smouldering) Mixed media on 80cm ø board. 2002.

Works in museums and collections.