

THE MAGIC OF THE SANTILARI

I couldn't attend the opening of the brothers Santilari in the Artur Ramón gallery. Next day I called some painters to know what they thought about it. Most of them agreed on their verdict. "A tremendous cure of humility". This was the recurring sentence.

During a lot of years I have believed that the new realism has taken such a long time beginning to show in Catalonia due to the pressure that criticism exercised against it. I also thought that the Anglo-Saxon world, with the London school or the new Northamerican realism, had advanced us twenty years on this topic due to the influence that the positivist philosophy has had in these countries. But now I value a new element, the possibility of choice that supposes to contemplate the great authors from the past in nearby and with easy access museums. Why, if not, the new realism appears simultaneously in Madrid, where authors like Claudio Bravo or Antonio López allow to fascinate themselves by the great Barrochian authors of the Prado, in London where Lucian Freud can study the magnificent portraits of Rembrandt and in New York where the Photorealists can contemplate the tiny brush-strokes of Vermeer in the Metropolitan, very near their workshops, while the Santilari brothers had to obligedly look for in books and magazines what they couldn't observe in the MNAC?

In spite of the museistic void, the generation of the Santilari brothers is the first, in Catalonia, that that bets collectively, on a determined way, to open the eyes abroad with the realistic painting, the photography or the documentary video. It is a sceptical generation that doubts of great religions that their predecessors had generated and their paintings carry implicitly the questioning of the dogmas of vanguards. Josep and Pere Santilari evolve from a lyric surrealism to a realism that connects with the Barochian tradition, Caravaggio, Van der Hamen, Vermeer,... and with the new realism that is developing in Madrid or in the United States.

Paradoxically the word magic is the one that best defines the skeptical painters Santilari. Their magic, like that of some writers, architects, footballers and cooks that comes from an overdeveloped technique that only certain gifted people addicted to their profession have. Anybody can put a colour next to the other and paint a picture, but in an exceptional painter many elements come together. And not necessarily in a simultaneous way: the topic choice, the originality of their compositions, the quality of colour stains, the solution of intermediate zones among them and endless details difficultly perceived from the first approximation to the painting.

The great technique of the Santilari brothers is more drawing than pictoric, it is based on gradation of tones and fusion of the limits. They hardly ever use the construction through colour like the Venetians or the impressionists did. The range of greys or of any other colour are valued with exact form in every zone of their pictures. If we observe with attention a cherry on their paintings we will see that in a tiny space four or five tones of the same colour coexist fused in a faultless way.

Everybody knows that the small format paintings of the Santilari brothers - are almost invincible and the only thing that I would dare criticise until now is the scant compositive risk of their paintings. For this reason I value positively that in their last exhibitions they try more risky compositions in large formats. The painting *L'altra mirada* by Josep, a

restless portrait with model, gives another turning point to the naked in grisalla painted along their career. This painting marks the definitive transformation of a topic that has evolved from surrealism lirism to a suggesting and special hiperrealism. This work and the great urban sceneries by Pere indicate us clearly that the twins from Badalona aspire to fight on the international scene with extremely ambitious paintings that transmit intense emotions up to now hidden back of their appearance of humble artisans.

Their drawings compete with those of the Ingres, or even with the one that is considered best painting of history, the portrait of Andrea Quaratesi by Michelangelo. Talking about competition in art may seem a sacrilege, but it is a hipocrisy not to admit that the artists compete with their contemporaries and with great artists of the past. In fact between the Santilari brothers there establishes a feedback of collaboration-competence daily and constant.

In the Renaissance probably they would not reach so high quotas of quality without the competence established among Rafael, Miguel Ángel and Leonardo in Rome and in Venice, among Tiziano, Tintoretto and the Veronese. The Santilari brothers are really leaving the slat very high!

Josep Segú, La Vanguardia, Cultures November 2006

THE REALISTIC PAINTING OF THE SANTILARI BROTHERS

Then, especially at the beginning of the 90s, there was a change. Collective and individual exhibitions held in Madrid supposed the instant success of the generation group that, born in the 30s, had appeared in the mid-50s, but that in that moment didn't participate in the predominant tendencies. I mainly mean Antonio López and the brothers Julio and Francisco López Hernández. It is not necessary to weigh up their value. What calls the attention is that this group had a "family air" that, at least to some extent, has been transmitted to all realists.

The second realistic generation would be the one that reached expressive and definite formula

About 1970, when art movements as the "pop" had already appeared that gave prestige to realism, although they did not have much to do with the artists above mentioned. Those who were born in the 50s or 60s that began to exhibit in the 80s persist in a line that, with them, testifies their solidity and does not need any principle on their favour. From their origin they had acquired their legitimacy—more difficult it is true, in Barcelona—and soon the change of artistic climate allowed them to conquer market. An extremely technical quality characterises them, but also a coincidence in topic. However, the artists of the youngest generation do not transmit a sensation of vibrant warmth, in a way that you have to ask yourself if they know better what to do rather than what to communicate. About realism, the same as about abstraction, you find in a certain academicism. Sometimes it seems too much architectonic drawing, too much open door as a reference to a supposed intimacy, too free evanescent and especially an excessive coldness between the painter and the painting. The spectator who is not attentive or whose vision has not been properly educated may find difficult to distinguish among qualities.

What calls the attention from the brothers Santilari is that they are very far from this kind of new academicism and that in exchange, although they are very young they have followed a trajectory already nurtured with experiences and capable of opening new ways. Besides, they possess the mastery of some of the best Spanish realistic painters of the generation, exhibited in art galleries from the 50s and nowadays, already present in museums.

