

## THE REALISTIC PAINTING OF THE SANTILARI BROTHERS

Nowadays realism does not need to be justified, but it can become a mannerism. Accepted before out of Spain than inside –the exhibition of “Contemporary Spanish Realists” of the Marlborough Gallery was held in London in 1973-, until the middle 80s lived among us like a kind of marginal way of art, appreciated but very minority and not fashionable. On that time, for this reason, there used to use for it an explicit language that due to the hegemony of abstraction, it tried to give it a justification with the method of distinguishing it from other formula considered conventional. It would be then a kind of painting that departing from reality would impose the overreal or of a surrealism that would depart from reality. The proper complexion of the language showed the difficulty of who had to interpret it with writing.

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 realist painters.

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 can end 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 it difficult to distinguish among qualities.

What calls the attention of 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.

In an unavoidable way, contemplating the paintings of the Santilari brothers seems to take us to the first Antonio López, in who there was also a mystery climate, as if to capture the magic of reality you had to go over surrealism. But like him they have also discovered that there is

nothing more attractive than the tremendous strength of reality itself. With the evolution of their work they have showed that they have liberated themselves from the temptations of repetition and besides, they have testified their capacity of change and advancement in a way of discipline towards simplicity. There is in them an identical passion for painting than their eldest belonging to realistic tradition. There is even that conscience –so present in “El sol del membrillo”, the film by Erice about Antonio López- of the ultimate impossibility of transferring to the picture or to the paper the reality that they have in front of their eyes. But this is precisely the conscience that becomes the essential challenge for their creative task.

In the work of the Santilari brothers the urban scenery from present Barcelona has an outstanding importance. It is true that others have accessed it, but it is very possible that the image of the postolympic city has been definitely left on their hands. Barcelona has had, like all cities with an artistic tradition, a succession of images centered, besides, in changing and enclosed spaces. Remember, for example, that scenery by Mir of Barcelona from the hillsides of Tibidabo or those often so conventional of the Ramblas. Madrid has passed for a long stage of suburban scenery from Eduardo Vicente to the first Antonio López. Only very recently this last one has looked for the newer perspective and many of the realistic youngsters have followed him.

But the important thing is not so much the scenery chosen than the way of capturing it. The danger of the technical capacity is the preciousity or the coldness, common sins of those who have not spiritual excellence. Painters of the urban profile of Barcelona, this Montjuïc, these towers of the Olympic Harbour, this Palace of Montjuïc... only half-seen in the horizon-, the Santilari brothers are also painters of shade. They know that to capture a scenery it is not enough to do it one hour a day, you have to do it in several hours, even in every one of the seasons to capture their definite substance. Thanks to their capacity to capture the shade they are also in disposition of owning the impalpable, of the atmosphere or of the air, which is not the same as heaven. Their painting is transparent like in Isabel Quintanilla who does not need a mind because it is nitid in a day of North wind, but because she has been able to realize something so difficult as the degree of wetness of the atmosphere or of the slow apparition or fading of the solar light when the electric light turns on or turns of. Nothing of this is possible without three essential requisites. First of all the insistance that can be obsessive for this impossibility of accomplishing the task of transferring all the richness of reality. On a first sight the transparency of these paintings may make you think in a thin layer of painting, but when you get near to them or contemplate them with detail you discover that it is not that way. They are the consequences of a hardworking work built on stubbornness. On second place an artisan wiseness is fundamental that is acquired through practice. It sometimes includes amazing findings such as the use of oil painting and and grafitti. And, at last, it is unavoidable a relationship between scenery and painter. Coldness could dominate these urban pictures, like the many North-American realists. But it is not this way: the prevailing sensation is warmth. They are loved sceneries, never indiffirent for the eye of who painted them nor who looks at them. The brothers Santilari have chosen for their work some subjects that use to be, although common, one of the most difficult in realistic painting: the object. The still life has a long tradition as a genre, also Spanish painting. Its danger may consist in preciousism but also in trying to transcend objects, animated or inanimated, towards a value which does not give off of themselves. This may be the case of Barochian “vanitas”. But in those still lives of common

objects or in these flowers which dry up the Santilari discover us the tremendous efficiency of the naked reality. They are not only seen, they are felt, their tactile quality adds to the flat or preciseness of their appearance. In these they are very close to the Spanish surrealists of the moment. And even also in another aspect: like in the case of, for example, Francisco López they are capable with the miracle pencil to transfer to the paper all the wonderful range of colours of their paintings. Sometimes it is very little appreciated as to consider it ancillary, The drawing acquires in their hands the definitive category of major work. For all this contemplating this exhibition the dominant impression is that Joseph and Pere Santilari are the best proof of continuity and renovation of the best present Spanish realism.

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