

THE VEHEMENT PAINTING OF YAGO HORTAL

“Precisely when the genetic technologies triumph, the liberal globalization and human rights, the postmodern label has exhausted its capacity to express the world which promotes it”.

Gilles Lipovetsky / Sebastien Charles

Vehemently captivating in his use of colour, heirs to the sumptuousness of the expressionist gesture and driven by an evocative passion is not without a refreshing breath of air, the uplifting vital energy of the paintings by Yago Hortal is bursting into the international contemporary art scene with a resounding force which can only be seen on rare occasions.

For many of us, his work was a complete discovery at the 2nd Vigo Contemporary Art Fair. In fact, in Atlantic Space 2011 we were conscious even then of the inevitable esteem for an artist whose ascendant career path had merely begun. Occupying a conspicuous wall on the stand of the gallery representing him in Spain, one couldn't help but notice the never ending coming and going of other gallery owners, critics, organisers and collectors asking who had produced these paintings which were so exuberant, so familiar and at the same time so different. Later we gleaned from the interest of galleries in Berlin and New York, that the artist was spending time in both cities alternating them with his hometown of Barcelona.

This fresh air, this burning flame, this “hyperpantone” of his, evokes the kind of visual fulfilment like those paintings which trace the history of modern art on the walls of museums throughout the world. Gestural abstractions, radical colour, a frenzied and at the same time, classical “only painting”, were configuring a very potent antidote to this “liquid art” of today where “the work”, is seen as a closed whole or as a completely autonomous configuration, had lost its place. “... we live in a world saturated by the aesthetic – pronounced Zigmunt Bauman – but in a world where there are no objects of art, where there are no works of art. Yes, there are still some out there, but they are in the museums...”.

Everything is left open to interpretation nowadays. Yet when we virtually begin to interpret the delightful painting of Yago Hortal, we realise that we are witness to the blossoming of a talent, the beginning of a career of someone ready to tackle nothing more and nothing less than that powerful distant tradition where the pictorial compositions were struggling until “coming up with the final, definitive, ultimate composition in which nothing can be improved”. It is the same ambition which tormented Hesse's Goldmund, or that Balzac tried to dramatise in his eloquent “The Unknown Masterpiece”. It is this genealogy of modernity that, according to Lipovetsky, would have re-emerged transformed by the new values of this society without writing history.

It is the aesthetic journey of weight and shade, of signs, trace and density, a substantive blow to the predomi-

nance of the logic of the ephemeral thing that, according to Christine Buci-Glucksmann, defines part of the “anti-art” of the XX century. It is this stroll through the imagination which contrasts with the realistic colour of life, this liking for the vibration of light, these undulations and the interactions of highlights where the names of the best abstract painters of today rise above the rest. We refer, to name but a few, to Gerhard Richter, Albert Oehlen, Pia Fries, Luis Gordillo and Juan Uslé.

Like them, Yago Hortal has taken this expressionist, colouristic route, completely open to the unpredictable but does not exclude the meticulous control of detail. Just as they do, the artist knows about this open secret of guided spontaneity which needs not only a master’s hand but also a matching ambition. As if it were a seductive metaphor for the uncertainty he deals with, Yago Hortal’s paintings are revealed as true kaleidoscopes of extraordinary chromatic wealth. His forms and colours are as open and expansive as they are meticulous in their impeccable visual clarity. With nothing to hide –since there is no fortuitous accident in his paintings– Yago Hortal constructs outbursts of colour that exceed the dimensions of the canvas itself, as if it were a playful wave that jumped over the dock. Perhaps wanting to project himself beyond his limits, always imprecise but sure, his paintings float towards the nebulous space of our imagination. And although the feeling of unpredictability dominates, we soon discover the existence of an unexpected order governing every composition, each thrust of colour, every twist, every excrescence.

As if it were about an automatic calligraphy, the “reading” of these tides of colour, is not unlike the deciphering of one of those surrealist poems in which the words interweave and confuse in an attempt to seduce us with the impossible artifice of their sounds. Without allowing us to specifically “understand” what they are saying, the paintings by Yago Hortal speak to us about all the forms of the painted image, of all its movements and visual rhythms, of all the explorations and discoveries that interact in a given moment so that someone can traverse the veil of the known to reveal to us their most unfamiliar, definitive face.

Even though we may link some of his techniques to even more distant times (we refer to those American abstract-expressionists who, in the post-war period, truly forged a path for art), his paintings show neither a shadow of that post-war existentialist bravado nor the “wild” vehemence of that generation who responded to the conceptual challenge.

They are other times and the mechanisms which activate the “expression” are different. It is that the “emptying” which Yago Hortal has in his canvases, more than a painful catharsis or divergent response or whatever form of rebellious opposition to a “system”, the exaltation of a conviction, a mere word suffices in some cases of intellectual coldness, an intentional refusal to use the language that is most apt for its creative needs, a chance for a new beginning, the return to a visual artistic conception based on the chromatic and formal behaviour of a trace, intellectually open to the intellect and the senses, the return to a tradition which had been almost wiped out by post-modern times.

It is enough to verify the perfection of the pictorial improvisations of Yago Hortal to realise that the artist possesses a powerful imagination, nourished by the profound knowledge that his work is linked to this visual culture. With a surprising maturity, it seems that the artist has been able to apply those wise words of Maurizio Ferraris to his paintings: “the image depends on the senses more than the intellect depends on the imagination, and if the imagination can already conceive the sense without feeling, it stands to reason that the intellect

can conceive without images”.

Yet this driving force of his, this clamour for the right to start from new every time and allow himself to be carried along by the pleasure of the feeling, would not affect us with this strength if he did not have, as all brave acts have, the sweeping force of a passion.

Pilar Ribal i Simó