

The variable world of José Noguero

ENRIQUE JUNCOSA

“Oh Night, how long has it been since I have seen you so full of heavenly bodies and glow-worms, so intoxicated with perfumes. After many years I can still recognize you in your blue flames, in your forests of chestnut and pine trees. I still recognize you in the fury of barking dogs and in the damp strawberries that sprout in the darkness.”¹

The passing of the years has converted the pictorial explosion of the eighties into a historical phenomenon that demands its own revision. It is still fashionable to reject the entire period, classifying it as extremely reactionary and as having been sparked off by mere economical interests. Yet, those that think to that effect are the same ones that have substituted critical formalism for new antipictorial dogmas that subsist on a continuing modern vision or history. These are the same people that claim that the eighties were playful and superficial years that falsely described really radical and difficult to assimilate positions.

In my opinion, the best or those paintings, as the new abstractions that have partially dominated the following decade or the also recent digital photographs, are part of the same phenomenon that brought about postminimalist sculpture when the prestige of the ideals of Modernity fell to pieces. In fact, all of these manifestations emphasize absolute all of these manifestations emphasize absolute formal freedom – sculpting went through very drastic changes and much of the recent photography lacks photographic attributes – and also defend the instrumentalization of any means or technique to obtain the determined ends. As a consequence, many of today’s finest artists pursue, above all things, effectiveness while continuing to manifest themselves skeptical of any indiscriminate cult to innovation or to dogmatic zeals.

A longing for meaning, although already far from a mere socio-political message, and the will to overcome the limiting impositions of shape and concept, of morality and theory, was expected after the minimal and conceptual art phase. However, now, Modernity is not seen exactly as in ruins but as a

1. Antonio Colinas, from *Novalis in Sepulcro en Tarquinia*, Lumen, Barcelona, 1976, p. 21.

source of inexhaustible treasures. What were considered finds by other artists – if we believe in Picasso’s famous phrase, one does not look, but instead finds – are tools that are used with accuracy and full consciousness, as part of what until now were unedited artistic languages, as personal and numerous, in a world just as multidirectional and fragmentary as it is questioning.

José Noguero’s recent paintings hint at all of these ideas and make up, at first sight, a curious anomaly within the context from which they arise. It might seem like they are similar to some of the most famous works from the international pictorial methods of the eighties – because of their intensifying coloring, their epic feel, and their difficult compositional balances – but the paintings that have this appearance are not built up upon a base of solely subject exaltation, as it is customarily interpreted and done in a scandalously frivolous manner in any case. We believe that his paintings make up a representation of a vision of the world that seems absolutely relevant to us nowadays. A world in movement, magmatic and chaotic in appearance, but above all governed by indubitable internal laws.

José Noguero’s paintings can also be considered a surprise within his trajectory as an artist. He had already found himself a place among the Spanish panorama of young artists with a series of photographs and sculptures of apparent neutrality and of an almost metaphysical air. In them we saw immobile and white figures in architectural spaces that were clean and blue, that seemed to shape inexplicable allegories. They dealt with hermetic and mysterious situations that hid fragile balances or subterranean dramas. They were not complete situations nor conclusions to stories, but instead episodes of a narrative with the appearance of being about to be altered.

These characteristics are not far from his recent work, where color acts as a destabilizing element radically altering the equilibrium of these academic-like drawings on which it is applied. Finally what he offers us is a moment of the process of painting, whose configuration could not have been foreseen. As does Xavier Grau, Noguero dialogues with his work as he paints, improvising at times, and consciously responding to a determined pictorial situation at others. This process, which is a kind of critical automatism, gives his work a feel of urgency and precariousness that reminds us, as we said before, of his earlier work, but this is not his only interesting peculiarity.

Sure enough we have spoken of academic-like drawings. Therefore, if Noguero’s paintings seem abstract at first sight, in truth they are not. For example, in this exhibition there are two especially reoccurring motifs that act as

a pictorial pretext and which also provide a clear, metaphorical reading that is effective. These motifs are; hunting – through numerous obsessive versions of a famous hunt of Paul de Vos that is in the Prado Museum and that shows a deer with imposing antlers besieged by a pack of dogs – and “the triumph of love” – from the famous fresco paintings by the same title that Anibale Carracci did on the ceilings of the Farnesio Palace in Rome.

It is fairly easy to see the exploitation of these motifs as the artist’s declaration of principles, who would see his work as an erotic and beloved persecution, with an uncertain outcome, but always enthusiastic. At other times, orgy scenes appear as well as not very specific references to the Baroque style, from Rubens to Titian. This entire emotional and intellectual map is coated with strongly contrasting colors – greens, yellows, purples, reds, blues, oranges ...– that suggest joy or an exultant and celebratory expression. Yet, the color might be arbitrary as we can find red leopards, yellow moles, or purple and green deer, and the image dissolves into a pictorial whirlwind – which is perhaps an echo of an idea of the world, as we have said before, that seems to allude to art and nature as being synonyms.

Therefore, we do not find ourselves before a neo-neoexpressionist – and nowadays, above all, the intention is more important than the shape² –, nor is it so important that Noguero has painted – neither would it be had he painted or what have you. His paintings, still young and exploratory, already demonstrate, however, how ridiculous discourses are – which at times seem to us nonetheless necessary – which are elaborated with terms like “he is a great painter,” “he works against the grain,” or “he proves that painting is still alive,” that we should perhaps forget forever. José Noguero observes as much reality as he does his favorite moments of art history. As he does he uncovers his own personality – exuberant, ironic, passionate, and contradictory – which, as a dark night invites us to awaken our senses, disposed to witness uncountable and surprising events.

2. I emphasize this because it is very common to group together works that look alike without taking anything else into consideration. In my opinion, for example, and without trying to be wicked in doing so, it seems to me that the works of Miquel Barceló, Martin Puryear, Panamarenko, Boyd Webb or Gary Hill but not those of Mimmo Paladino, Jaume Plensa, Marcel Broodthaers, Thomas Ruff or Bill Viola, are worthy of looking at and just so as to give examples of names that nobody would be surprised to see listed together in such a way.