

Maximizing the spirit

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Any artistic discourse at this time that seeks to be consistent, whatever form its outward manifestation may take, contains, implicitly and almost by definition an ideological discourse and a posture – one might almost say existential - in relation to things that happen. After all, even the most hidebound banality, tautology, and reiteration imply a clear choice, if only by omission; in the event, absence defines the choice. Clearly, reflections on power, state control, and predetermined speculation do not appear at the artistic surface of the work in any obvious way. If they did, we would be confronted by a strange kind of realism that would at once be invalidated. These are questions the artist reveals by making use of means towards an end that is not purely pictorial. But neither does he lose sight of the fact that pictures are the product presented to the view of the spectator and that, somehow or other, the product is one of the major points in a process that has its beginnings in the theoretical approach of the artist, in the genesis of the work, in mutual relationships of function and use, and the links between the human being and the environment. There is thus an epistemology that includes reflection on the whole problem of the individual as creator-subject that embraces his situation in the universe, both from the point of view of a being belonging to a social body and the purely individual perspective of him as a biological entity. Present conditions evidently demand that the artist should be able to reconcile his dedication to ontological problems and the more specific ones related to visual expression, to the *mise en scène*, considering that the dichotomy between form and substance is merely an accidental coincidence and that the long road of originality must be travelled with sufficient baggage, a breadth of view and knowledge to take care of the most unlikely eventuality. Thus equipped, he is in a position to affirm himself and, later, assert his own separate identity. In this respect, the most radical choice begins with recognizing that he is different and rejecting consent and unanimity.

Bearing these considerations in mind, we can say that if there is one thing that explicitly characterizes presence in the world of art today, it is a kind of obstinate militancy in the ranks of what we could call contemporaneity, both as regards the desire for a permanent relationship with a present that is more mental than physical, and the declared rejection of anything that implies immediacy, anecdote or excessive circumstantiality, with all their obvious risks. We are, in short, in the presence of tolerant positions and attitudes, and clearly, these are transposed into works that assume contradiction and struggle against dogma; spacious or concentrated works, firm or hesitant that explore and display the skeptical spirit that must be maintained at all costs, incorporating elements derived from multiple situations, both real and personal. Works which, as in this case, can be ascribed to what has elsewhere been described as tolerant painting.

This aspect of what is contemporary in artistic conduct is, beyond technical questions and accepted methods of representation, a kind of fusion of both and, in an essential way, a very specific choice tending towards an attitude that accepts and values hybridism, a visible attitude towards life, physical existence and individual artistic activity, with all the evident accumulation of contradictions that this implies for a creator, and the strong dose of skepticism needed to keep the work going. This conjunction, these links, however, shun any temptation towards specificity: they are links with the situation rather than submission to the whims of fashion, of anything that can be suspected of being transient or ephemeral.

If we have pursued our thought to this point it is because some of the most evident qualities of the painting and personal attitudes of Lorenzo Valverde are to be found within the parameters defined. He is a strictly contemporary painter, rooted and linked to the conditions of existence itself, with its human and social implications.

As is only logical, this stance in regard to contemporaneity does not include any mimetic delusions, nor is it transcribed in the form of a mirror image. Contrary to such hypothetical reproductions of reality or re-shuffling of some of its typical elements, the link with the present time signifies the

progressive inclusion of the whole range of the artist's existential experience, together with all the intellectual assumptions that mark him out as a creator. It is the connection between psychic and conceptual disposition and the tangible world of things. Ultimately, the contemporary spirit is translated into a kind of dialectic between chance and necessity, a conceptual split that ends by agreeing with the category of necessities which may finally pass from vital to material.

Fortunately, the total of possible theoretical, conceptual and aprioristic considerations concerning the artist can be reduced to two fundamental features in Lorenzo Valverde's painting: rigor, and the wreck of the illusionist manner, both causally related to each other; hence the painter also believes that painting is not merely a problem of haute cuisine.

The rigor derives from the analysis of reality and reveals itself in his way of painting, above all in its subject-matter. Thus, an apparent roughness in execution is counterbalanced by firmness in composition and the recurrence of powerful images. Great forms, horizontal for the most part, contain structural arrangements resembling pentagrams that run parallel to the spectator as he moves from the contemplation of one picture to the next. Here, the usual virtuality of the images has completely disappeared: they are flatly defined, without scenery; there is no perspective or optical illusion, no diminishing with distance into space. There is a sequence of shapes that alter, interrupt or create a kind of rhythm, or cadence, freed from specific reference that reaches only the spirit, that speak, therefore, at the moment of their creation and in the later understanding of the spectator. They have a territory entirely their own.

These forms that, as it were, simply appear, redound to their fictitious nature and have existence only to the extent that they are visible in the picture. Once their potentiality has been lost, and with their condition of being recognizable, each work becomes the private stage for projects and materializations that can only be seen in themselves. Each of these scenes, or pictures, begins and ends with its own limits and is to be understood within them. There is a consciousness of what is essential; substance is the deepest truth, and the manner is the only way of representing it. This characteristic of what is essential becomes a kind of minimalist revision, a revision without the historical connotations implicit in "isms". The minimalist aspect is through exclusion, so superfluous elements are eliminated, and any temptation towards rhetoric rejected, any figurative repetitions or a ponderous load of representation. The spirit of the essential, therefore, requires concentration on the nucleus, the origin, and demands and centres the attention on the spiritual aspect. It appeals to emotional effects by means of color and form, in the way the work appears to the senses. And it is at this moment of connection that related ideological concepts can appear when the deep structures that have just been discovered reveal the absence of the narrative factor; because we have also discovered that chronological time, too, is absent. For ultimately, narrative illusion runs parallel to the passage of time and is dependent on it.

Lorenzo Valverde's current pictures show a highly personal way of making art, very different from what is usually admitted. In addition, there is a factor that at this time is beginning to be more of a liability than an advantage: he is young. Whether or not this is so, just as whether or not this is a new kind of art is immaterial; what interests him is precisely the factor of differentiation, individuality, not as a sign of oddity but as an element which is able to be selective among the consensus and unanimity we spoke of earlier. It is, therefore, surprising that the personal development of the artist should have come into focus so soon, ignoring the more obvious influences or too evident similarities, though without avoiding the tone set by the times, thus tuning into the generational wavelength of the present epic.

If not, how then can we understand this rigor if we leave aside the reflective aspect of the phenomenon of creativity? A reflective aspect that parallels the conditions of life itself and is focused completely naturally, as a concept of things from the point of view of ethics; the word brings to mind the dignity of man, not, of course that of the artist.

This feeling of morality, related both to conduct and the explication that the works involve, does not, however, induce in us the concept of morality as mission or objective, but as the necessary ingredient extracted from the deepest principles of the human condition, and the condition itself. Conceiving things from personal parameters allows another element to be included in the present case that equally explains the sense and feeling of the work: the passion that has the effect of

radicalizing the eye, making it forget everything that seems alien, and that clothes man with the attributes of the most creative and centered self.

As someone once pointed out, painting is a Trojan horse; if it was not, it might be nothing but a surface filled with mindless tautologies. But now it becomes the nucleus of a problem based on appearance and contents like two sides of the same coin, in a highly linguistic sense. Lorenzo Valverde uses this duality but stretches it to include the implied values his painting contains. As with the Trojans, the final results and their repercussions on reality are produced with latent effect, a delayed-action explosion. Thus the moral charge and ideological factor, far from being explicit, are implied and integrated in an organized way with the whole formal repertory, giving it the meaning it needs to achieve independent existence, and revealing itself in its totality as a corpus that is susceptible of multiple interpretations.