

Fanum Naturae/ Almost Only Blue

My arguments for writing about this exhibition by Nico Munuera, called *Fanum Naturae/ Almost Only Blue*, seem commonplace. Explaining them once was not enough - it never is. That his work is poetry and precision is a fact that must be verified in front of the paintings. It always produces aesthetic enjoyment to contemplate them in situ; his presentation of the landscape avoids mimesis. The artist transcends that limitation of pictorial genre. Rather, he evokes the sublime and the infinite. Painting is also a stronghold of learning and freedom: a parapet made up of very fine layers: the support, the primer, the thinner, the binder and the pigments. Water, an ingredient in the primordial soup, also dissolves and is part of the medium. The acrylic dispersion, perfectly homogeneous, spreads over the edges of the support and colors where it falls.

*"The water soaks the earth and the sky
The flow suddenly stops
It flows again according to the direction of the waves."*¹

Nico shares with the Zen Buddhist thinking the concept of the absolute dimension, the need to encompass the entire universe from his workshop. Enclosed, alert, conscious, he stops rational thought and lets the other one; he adds water to the paint, beats the sea blue current and presents his visions of the waves with a gesture. In the last line of the previous poem, the synthesis appears, the liberation of the poetic voice, the freedom to float with the waves. This is how mood happens in the water.

Fanum Naturae/ Almost Only Blue is a collection of states of the soul, understood as Juan-Eduardo Cirlot defines in his dictionary the landscapes that: "arise to explain moments in which certain different influences are superimposed in a variable degree of mixture and combination." The poet poses it as an analogy, where the landscape is adopted by the spirit of whoever contemplates it, "by virtue of the qualities that it possesses in itself and that are the same as the subject." Thus, these paintings contain the truth that caused them, the image of water and its imprint, the relief that comes from painting every day or the very stratigraphy of the earth's crust. I believe that the identification of life with the pictorial process precipitates emotions within the painting, wet on wet, entwined with restlessness or desire. We have read his handwritten annotations on some graphic work, where he explained the meaning of the stains objectively, scientifically, as in Humboldt's *Naturgemälde*, avoiding giving symbolic values to numbers or colors. Moving illusion and impossible measure. Goethe distinguished, in his *Theory of Colors*, between symbolic color and allegorical color, the one in line with Nature and the one that needs prior knowledge of the sign to have a meaning. It was based on the belief in the direct, unmediated effect of color on feelings and the brain². The arbitrary chromatic schemes, which throughout history tried to establish moral values and psychological nuances to color, have in common certain associations with the darkest, ultramarine or Prussian blue, which link it to divinity, to order of the sacred, to the depth of the transcendent and the color silver to redemption. They are the two opposite poles in our painter's palette.

¹ BAHK, J. W., *Surrealismo y budismo Zen*, Verbum, Madrid, 1997, p. 85.

² GAGE, J., *Color y Cultura*, Siruela. Madrid, 1993, p. 204.

It was a Chinese cultural tradition to give more importance to the landscape than to man, the figure, before the macrocosm than the microcosm. Cirlot quotes the poet Kouo-Hi:

"If the superior man loves the landscape, what is the reason? Hills and gardens are places that will always be frequented by those who seek to cultivate their original nature; the fountains and rocks give constant joy to those who walk around whistling..."

This painting collection is a consequence of traveling and staying. The choice of place causes an indefinite, subjective affinity, which makes one return to that state, isolated, as if on an island. This is how it has been physically for years. They are accesible formats with the back bent, to be able to be painted with wide movements, to the scale of his body, from the bottom to the surface. Emerged and built in layers, like mica and plaster, in luminous silvers and frozen blues. A curiosity about Stratigraphy (from the Latin *stratum*, 'bed', and from the Greek *γραφῆ* [*graphḗ*], 'writing'): it is the branch of Geology that deals with the study and interpretation, identification and description of sedimentary rocks. This science is used to draw a geological map, a complex task that requires: spatial vision and knowledge of geometry, knowing how to relate a sequence of arranged events, showing the four space-time dimensions and capturing everything on a two-dimensional support, on half a ream of paper. Charting time and other impossibilities like how to make a stratigraphic section of the sea? How to present a boiling wave and an icy bed of silvery shells, all at the same time? Nico has made EVERYTHING visible by painting this series.

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