

PAINTED SCRIPTURES

For those of us who already have grey hair on the temples of our memory, the name, and the work, of Javier de Juan (Linares, Jaén, 1958) awaken in us a good number of accents and memories, always pleasant, always bathed in a certain patina of nostalgia and of times - good - past. The eighties, "la Movida", Madrid me mata... A time of illusions, hopes, liberties, desires to live and experiment. Perhaps full of naivety and lack of reflection. But, undoubtedly, also full of Life, with capital letters. A seminal moment.

Coherence and evolution

It was in this context that the figure of Javier would emerge as one of the main representatives of the new plastic art that was beginning to emerge at that time. Possessing a very personal and recognisable voice and a splendid mastery of drawing and colour, he became one of the most present and active artists in the field of drawing and painting at that time.

But unlike other names who also began to stand out in that "prodigious decade", and who due to life or professional circumstances were unable to evolve in their initial styles, Javier de Juan has managed to maintain a coherent and constantly evolving artistic career, always preserving his most characteristic creative hallmarks.

In the early 1980s he began his artistic career as a painter and illustrator, at that time very much imbricated in the assumptions of the so-called New Spanish Figuration, made up of a series of very diverse artists, but at the same time with some common features - fundamentally a high figurative, colourist and narrative temperature - which emerged at that time very much influenced above all by the personal pictorial voice of Luis Gordillo.

His studies at the School of Architecture were to leave an unquestionable mark on his works, largely centred on urban themes, reflecting different aspects of the city, its buildings and streets, its dynamism, and above all the different archetypes and human genealogies that inhabit and populate his compositions.

Over the years, although his aesthetic, stylistic and expressive interests have logically evolved, being always very interested in the dissemination of his images through serial work, and even for some time now in the use of new languages and creative strategies, including video and digital processes, the fact is that there are and remain in him a series of formal and conceptual features that define and give meaning to his own voice as an artist.

Plastic alphabet

Traits that could make up, if I may be allowed a singular and plural plastic alphabet. We would begin with the **D** for Drawing. Javier de Juan, let's put it bluntly, is a splendid draughtsman, with an innate ability to tell stories through images. His technique is fresh, agile, clear and simple. With just a few lines and graphics he is able to build scenes, situations, moments and of course

scenes, situations, moments and, of course, emotions. His characters, men and women, are always recognisable and are animated by a special liveliness, full of energy, registers, movements and also sensuality.

I propose to continue with the **N** for Narration. In his works, whether drawings, engravings, illustrations, paintings or videos, Javier is always narrating things, stories, events. They can be inspired by high culture: mythology, history, literature, or by simple events of real, everyday life. What is clear is that they never disappoint us. Because of this narrative dimension, because of this will to narrate, his works can always be read as small - or not so small - stories.

The letter **U** of Urbanita cannot be missing from this brief and summarised alphabet. I have already stated before that he is an artist whose imaginary is

nourished and supplied to a great extent by the fauna and flora that populate the diverse and variegated environment of the city. The streets, the cars, the passers-by, the illuminated signs, the buildings form a dynamic totuum revolutum and compose before our eyes an active and energetic urban song.

And what about **C** for Colour? Despite the fact that in his pieces line and graphics have their own voice that can be heard clearly, the truth is that Javier is an artist who manages to make the chromatic registers also present their candidature as important elements in his work. Colours with a marked warm texture, oranges, yellows, reds, which in turn are tempered and modulated with other shades closer to the cold realm of blues and greens.

I also propose the **I** of Imagination. An artist who generates narratives and visual stories full of inventiveness and winks can never be without the warp and weft of the imaginative. Images yes, but, without a doubt, images that are the offspring of his fertile imagination.

As a possible last - or penultimate - letter, the **T** of Text. Throughout his career, words, phrases and, in general, textual registers have always been present in his works, but not as a mere accompaniment to the visual sphere, but rather making clear a notable desire to play a leading role, with an authentic (written) voice and vote.

Resetting(s)

There is no doubt that art, and by extension artists, who are the ones who ultimately make it possible and visible, have marked in their hearts and heads the DNA of survivors and, therefore, the magical capacity to transform problems into solutions, and difficulties into creations. The current Pandemic (let each reader put their favourite adjective here) has meant, amongst other things, the suspension and paralysation of numerous artistic projects, and consequently the realisation of artists of the need to consider new strategies, and new ways of expression. A sort of personal and professional "resetting".

Javier de Juan's case was no different. After the hard confinement in Madrid, he settled during the months of last summer in a coastal spot in the Mediterranean, equipped and accompanied by a good number of sheets of paper, acrylics and charcoals, and, above all, with a great desire and need to open new channels of creation and, even more importantly, with the determined plan of not having any plan. As he himself says, "to let my hand run through the folds of my memory, of my subconscious". Letting the pure pleasure of painting - an elixir increasingly less consumed by many painters - fill his days and nights.

A peculiar biblical imaginary

And so, in a (pre)meditated manner, that is to say, without applying any filter of sketch, idea or previously thought-out intention, a series of new images began to emerge in the studio, as if by the magic of art, which nevertheless also carried within them already known, almost familiar aromas. The figures and compositions that emerged from the paper, like daughters of the gesture and the stroke of his hand, did so at the same time as emblems of his memory. It is curious, but absolutely true, that in the storehouse of our memories there can coexist such unsuspected things as those stories - which we were told were sacred - taken from the biblical chest of the Old Testament, and which we were told at school, during religion classes. I must confess, with hardly any modesty, that I loved those stories of heroes, battles, epics, deaths and sex, yes, you heard correctly, sex too...

Well, I strongly suspect that Javier de Juan also shares with me these memories, so veiled, and at the same time so close. That is undoubtedly the reason why in recent months this peculiar imaginary has emerged from his memory and has taken up residence in his paintings.

In this way, two men fighting can stage the eternal fraternal struggle between Cain and Abel with the addition of a colossal donkey's jaw as an accomplice

wink, or beautiful and sensual girls become Delilah and Judith or beautiful and sensual girls become Delilah and Judith, with the fundamental aim of cutting either hair or heads, and also, why not, a desirable teenager with pert and haughty breasts, sunbathing on the beach, is transformed into a new and revisited Susanna, observed and desired by a procession of mature men in bathing trunks. Or a young, mixed-race David, who appears ready to take on a larger piece as Goliath, with the sole resource of a humble slingshot. Or new images of old stories such as Abraham and Isaac, the struggle between Jacob and the angel, and the Golden Calf...

Alongside these apparently surprising and unexpected iconographic and thematic registers, and I stress apparently, because the different stratigraphic layers of an artist's memory can be, as in this case, as rich and varied as his own, Javier also dives into other equally diverse sources of inspiration, such as German Expressionism, Anglo-Saxon Pop of the 60s and part of the 70s, and closely linked to it, the inventiveness of the artist's imagination, and closely linked to it, the inexhaustible generator of images and narratives that cinema, television, comics, and the magmatic iconosphere that feeds us, and which on many occasions overflows us and, paradoxically, almost blinds us by dint of throwing images and more images into our eyes without almost giving us time to even digest them.

With all these ingredients, started last summer by the sea and continued in this strange winter of unknown snowfalls and known viral waves, well seasoned with the spices of imagination and work, Javier de Juan now proposes ESCRITURAS, his new exhibition project, which already by its very title gives off obvious biblical aromas, but which also affects his particular use of phrases and words, as I have indicated above, and which undoubtedly add to his proposal a rich narrative and textual dimension which undoubtedly add a rich narrative and textual dimension to his proposal.

Francisco Carpio (Art critic)