

HORACIO TORRES

Born in Italy in 1924, Horacio Torres was raised internationally in France, Spain, and South America by his father, the Uruguayan Constructivist painter Joaquín Torres-García, who was also to become his teacher. Horacio Torres grew up in an atmosphere that was artistically supportive and enriching. As a child he came into contact with some of his father's friends, among them Vantongerloo, Mondrian, Arp, Calder, and Lipchitz. In 1936, aged 12, he submitted works to the *Salon des Surindépendants* in Paris. He continued living and traveling in Europe and South America until he eventually came to New York in 1970 to attend the Guggenheim Museum Retrospective of the work of Joaquín Torres-García.

Simply stated, Torres paints full-bodied female nude figures wrapped in the enveloping folds of heavy drapery against a broad painterly expanse that unfurls horizontally across the entire surface of the canvas. And yet the statement is not simple; on the contrary, like fragments from a great myth, these large-scale paintings have a Homeric grandeur.

As you look at them, you find yourself moving away in order to place them into better perspective (much like a Tiepolo ceiling: best seen from a distance, at odd angles). From the deep bonds of traditionalism, one hears the faintest echoes of classical murmurings; out of the generosity of Titian, Rubens, and Giorgione, the tenderness of Ingres, Chardin, and Renoir, none of the clues provided are explicit; they are merely the faintest whisperings of past idioms.

His Amazon women, with their distinctively classical bodies, the strong, mythological bodies of ancient goddesses and heroines, are carefully placed among the drapes, against the sweeping backgrounds, cropped and half-hidden so that only parts of them are revealed: the swoop of a shoulder along the arm down to the hip with a breast peeking out; the arch of an uncovered back from the vulnerable nape of the neck to the fleshy, well rounded buttock; an elbow, a knee, a foot,



Horacio Torres, *Partial Nude on White Cloth, Red Background*, 1971. Oil on canvas, 62 x 74". Courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

a hand, each one shrouded by yards and yards of cloth.

When he places two women together in the same painting, they do not interrelate emotionally at all. They are not there emotionally, but as an aesthetic device. Rarely does he show a face, a head as they tend to distract from the overall unity of the painting. In one painting where a woman's facial expression is somewhat explicit, her look is of such stoic withdrawal that it in no way intrudes, and therefore does not interfere with his strict sense of unity.

In reality, the woman in each painting is no more important to the painting, no more the subject of the painting, than either the draperies or the background. She is not the focal point of the painting. In a sense there is no focal point as, texturally, each element is treated with the same degree of abstract painterliness: the flesh tones warm, tactile, sensual; the fabric and

background equally alive with no psychological differentiation between the care given to any one element, each being painted with equal passion and equal attention given to their surface articulation. His robust, dimpled bodies blend into the soft folds of brightly lit, deeply shadowed velvets and linens. With their huge scale and mammoth proportions, their strong modeling, they are like highly evolved studies for monumental sculpture. They do not just sit there, but seem to have been captured in mid air as they were about to shift position, and their lack of evident movement is not so much passive as it is thoughtful.

Tightly controlling the closeness of his values with a very high-key, luminous palette, he surprises and astonishes the eye with peachy, Rubinesque flesh tones, flashes of deep carmine, hot pinks, strident orange. Buttery whites vie with dusky blues.

Green, purple, yellow, and gray hover over cloth and body and dance off into the elliptical, mysterious background. A pulsing light shimmers behind the abstracted, truncated forms leading the eye well beyond the limited and infinitely limitless background, and the paintings, carried to the climax of their ultimate abstraction, become vibrant, shuddering landscapes: the desert, the mountains, the sea with waves pounding the rugged, eternal cliffs which inch by inch recede.

The controlled authority, the rough sensuality, and the naked and unafraid passion with which Torres attacks his paintings imbue each with a joyous, orgasmic vitality; it is with sadness and a deep sense of deprivation that one realizes it all, of necessity, ends here. (Tibor de Nagy, *January 27-February 15*)