

## Ronald Christ interview with Julio Alpuy, 1972

RONALD CHRIST: What was the most important thing Torres-García taught to you?

JULIO ALPUY: His teaching about his concept of art was the most important thing to me: his ideas about art, about life, about life in art, about materials in art, about rules in art. He taught us all this and he always emphasized the notion that an artist could be free, truly free, once he possesses them all, then he is free to be himself.

RC. What you got from him, then, was more theoretical than practical?

JA: No, that's so. Both, theory and practice. For Torres-García, the theory of art could never be separated from the practice of art, from life itself. He tried to mix the two, to interpret life through the rules of art and to thus create a new reality, another reality. As he said, art is the real reality –the spirit, if you can say that.

RC. But there would be a recognizable connection between the reality of life and this reality of life, wouldn't there? A connection, so you might be able to recognize the forms of one in the forms of the other?

JA. Of course yes –For me, yes. When I interpret one tree or one person, I think about the reality of life which is the beginning, the source. Look at this picture which I did in about 1946: a flower, a landscape, a person –every kind of reality. Everything, every thing comes from life here. For twenty years I did that and when I went to work in something that is very abstract, you can still see that it comes from something visible – you now exactly how the mechanism of reality is.

RC. But the geometry here is very different from that in your early works. To use your word, that geometry is more descriptive. I mean that a sphere is plainly a sphere there and only, perhaps, something else.

JA Of course my use of geometry is different now –it's more suggestive. I employ this rule of form very freely now, whenever I need it.

RC Are you trying to get to a universal imaginary, a universal language? I'm reminded of your composition entitled "Universe".

JA Yes, that's true. Torres – García also tried the same thing, but in his work the structure is schematic while here in my composition, geometry is not the goal

RC What about your frequent use of wood sculpture in contrast to the more characteristically flat work of Torres-García? That strength you speak of is very different from the kind Torres-García achieved with his fractionalizing grids which emphasized the plane of his canvas.

JA. You know, I never related to Torres-García's work in this matter. The problem was this: when I was with Torres I was always thinking as I looked at the symbols, at the indications of

relief, I was always saying to myself: It would be wonderful to make this real – to put this relief into real materials whatever they might be. When Torres-García taught us to paint, he said “A Painting is always flat”. But, as I worked with things in a more spatial way, I found myself going deeper into things, getting more and more expressive.

Now there is another thing: I could never leave off painting because I’m very responsive to the surface; but when I paint, I’m very flat! The color is important, but for me the relief is a more attractive problem, it class for more daring on my part. Well, the two come together in the solution to a problem, in the expression of an idea that has been with me for a long, long time – the creation of a landscape suggested by a few forms and several tones as in this piece (plate 27). Here the forms and colors are the synthesis of the horizon, the horizontal earth you walk on. You see when I work with a form; I need to create an environment for it. Look at this (plate 8). This piece is an adventure for me because it is an n isolated form. I guess my tendency has to do with one’s psychology, the need to work out patterns, the need to workout patterns from one’s childhood, to save oneself by doing that; but anyway, this form is the only one I didn’t need an environment for.

RC And do you find that people follow your intentions; that is, respond to your work in the way you want, or does the work sometimes need some explanation?

JA I prefer that the viewer discover the work for himself. Of course if he can’t, then I can help him; but in this matter, too, I’m very lucky because people understand very well. My works are not mysteries. If you are sensitive to the mystery of the natural objects, then that’s all to the good.

RC You don’t want your viewer to decipher this work then?

JA No. And as I understood him, Torres-García didn’t want people to do that either. He said, for example: This object here is a cup. You say “give me a cup” but you have an idea of “cup” very different from this thing. But you take this thing and in looking at it you see you have a rectangle or a triangle with a small circle attached to it. But that’s not the development of a vocabulary. What counts is the structure, not the signification –the structural relationship between the parts of the ensemble. Everything lives, according to Torres-García, in relation to everything else. Man exists in relation to the sun; but when you are looking at things this way, you’re not talking about John or Carl –you are speaking of Man, the simplified idea of Man.

RC But your work is not impersonal. After all, it is filled with you; it’s your world.

JA I think so, I hope so. Then too, man is at the center of my work.